

Journey Into Discipleship

Volume 4

Sermon 31 through Sermon 40

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.

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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.**

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Sermon 31: How To Straighten Out Your Relationships

The Bible says that the Fall of Man came about when Adam and Eve tried to substitute knowledge about life for living in right relationships. They lost their home in paradise because their basic relationships fell apart and “all the king’s horses and all of the king’s men couldn’t put them back together again.” Only God Himself could do that, and He came in the person of Jesus to do exactly that — to straighten out our relationships!

As descendants of Adam and Eve, our number one problem in life is still relationships. Men and women are miserable today simply because they cannot relate right with other people. Many can’t relate right with husband, wife, children, or in-laws. Others are up-tight most of the time because they can’t get along with a boss or employee or fellow worker on the job. Life is turned upside down for others because of wrong relationships with former friends or fellow church members. You see, relationship is what life is all about; if your basic relationships are not right, life itself cannot be right! Not only do poor relationships in a particular area affect your life in that area, they will inevitably cause your relationships to deteriorate in other areas too.

A man who fails to relate right to his boss or someone at the office or on the job, will bring that failure home with him and it will inevitably affect his relationships with his family. A husband and wife who cannot relate to each other will have problems teaching or witnessing for our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to spread the good news of reconciliation you must first experience that reconciliation yourself. Of course, you can teach or witness about a legalistic religious doctrine, but unfortunately that is not what Christianity is about. Christianity is about a life of grace which enables us to relate right in every area of life! As Jesus teaches His disciples the basic discipleship lessons before going to the Cross, He impresses upon them this one fact: “You must get your basic relationships in life right or you cannot be My disciples!” This is the truth Jesus teaches His disciples as Discipleship Lesson #31, found in the last two paragraphs of chapter 14 of Luke: Luke 14:25-35.

Discipleship Lesson #31

As disciples we must have a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ, a working relationship with our Living God, and a love-relationship with other people.

Here, Jesus reveals to us the three essential steps we must take to straighten out our relationships.

Scripture

Luke 14:25-35

Text

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.... Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; men throw it away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
Luke 14:27, 34-35

I. Faith-relationship with Jesus the Christ

We must start, the Bible says, with a personal relationship with the man Jesus as the Christ. That must be first. Why must we start there? We must start there because Jesus is the only provision God has made for fallen man to get right with both God and man! Notice how Jesus begins our scripture lesson: *"If anyone comes to me ..."* How do we come to Jesus? The Bible says we must first come to Jesus as our Savior. That is, we must start with a personal relationship with the man Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one from God, to be our Savior. God sent Jesus to us because we could not straighten out our broken relationships on our own. Jesus comes to us as God's answer for all of our poor relationships. We must begin by getting our relationship with Jesus right. When the Bible uses the word "faith" it always means the way we relate to Jesus Christ. Jesus put it this way in our text:

"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:27).

By this He means that there are no short cuts for us, just as there were none for Him. The cross of a Christian is to obey Jesus as God the Son, just as the Cross of Jesus was to obey God the Father, even to death! That "cross of obedience" is the way to resurrection into a life of right relationships. Jesus is our way to right relationships! It is only in the context of such faith that we can understand what Jesus means in the opening words of our scripture, when He says:

"Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'" (Lk 14:25-26).

For years I cringed each time I read this, saying, "Surely, Jesus can't mean that!" I would discard it and go on to something more palatable. One day, the Lord would let me ignore it no longer. He let me know that He means exactly what He says! He showed me that like Adam, I too was trying short cuts by putting the wrong relationships first. We all do, for that is the predicament of man since the Fall. Our predicament, like Adam, is that we think we can reach the right ends in life without first going through the God-ordained means to those ends. This, says Jesus, always keeps us from experiencing the abundant life.

Of course, Jesus wants us to love our family right. He came to this earth and gave His life so we can love our family right; but before we can experience such right relationships of love we must first have a faith-relationship with Jesus. In order to establish this faith-relationship with Jesus we must come to the point in our life where we literally hate anything or anyone who keeps us from having it.

By the word “hate” Jesus means recognizing that anyone who keeps us from putting our faith-relationship with Jesus first in our life is really our enemy, no matter how close our kinship. He is an enemy because he is opposing what is best for us. He is our enemy because he is occupying the place that Jesus must occupy in order for all of our relationships in life to be right.

The multitude Jesus was talking to that day was no different than the multitude He talks to today whenever and wherever His gospel is proclaimed. The people in that multitude wanted what Jesus had to offer, but they were not willing to pay the price. They wanted His miracles without obeying Him. They wanted to take short cuts. They wanted right relationships with father, mother, wife, husband, children, brothers and sisters, without going through Him as God the Son. They wanted a love-relationship with their families without first coming into a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ, and that’s impossible! It’s impossible because only Jesus, as the Son of God, can give us the love we need to restore and heal our broken relationships. That is why God the Father sent His Only Son to us. God sent us His Son to give back to us what we lost in the Fall: our right relationships on all levels of life. Jesus alone can restore our broken relationships. All relationships depend first upon a personal relationship with the man Jesus as the Christ — as our Savior — to deliver us from the ego-centered, selfish love that destroys relationships. Before we can have right relationships on the other levels of life, we must first have a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior.

“If any person would come after me,” Jesus says, *“let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life (that is, whoever would take short cuts and try to put other relationships first) will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake (that is, whoever puts his faith-relationship with me first) will find it”* (Mt 16:24-25). Yes, the first step in straightening out life’s relationships is to come into a faith-relationship with Jesus as the Christ, as our own personal Savior.

II. Working relationship with the God the Spirit

That’s only the first step. When Jesus said: *“If any one comes to me ... ”* He not only meant coming to the man Jesus as the Christ, as our Savior, He also meant coming to Him as our Lord, our living God! How do we come to Jesus Christ as our Lord? The Bible says there is only one way and that way is to relate right to the resurrected and living Christ as our living God! By this the Bible means we must not only have a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior; we must also have a working-relationship with the living Christ as our living God. This is what Paul calls becoming a spiritual person as opposed to a natural person.

Look at the relationship between Adam and God before the Fall, and you will see what the Bible means by this. Before the Fall, Adam has a working-

NOTES

relationship with God. Adam knows God, he is aware of God, he trusts God. God is as real to Adam as Eve is. God speaks and Adam hears. God seeks out Adam and Adam gladly comes to God. All of Adam's security is found in this working-relationship with God. This alone is his hope.

After the Fall, that working-relationship ceases, and you search in vain for this perfect working-relationship between man and God as you read through the rest of the Bible. Oh, you get a glimpse of it, now and then, but you don't see this same perfect working-relationship between man and God again until you actually encounter the Second Adam in Jesus as the Christ. There it is all over again: Jesus knows God, He is aware of God, He trusts God. God is as real to Jesus as Peter and James and John. God speaks and Jesus hears. Jesus finds all of His security in this working-relationship with God. This alone is His hope!

The good news is that this is exactly the kind of working-relationship with God that Jesus came to give us. This alone is our hope, too — not a philosophical, nebulous, impersonal relationship with a far-off, obscure God, but a real, personal, working-relationship with a God who comes to us, talks to us, whom we know and trust, who is as real to us as the human beings around us, and in whom we find our eternal security. This is our hope! This God the New Testament calls "the Holy Spirit," or "God the Spirit." This God is the third person of the Trinity — our living God who comes to us to give us the power, love, truth, and assurance we need for living our daily lives. This is the same God who came to Peter and Paul and the others after the Resurrection. This is our only hope! This is what Jesus means when He says:

"...it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you"
(John 16:7b).

He means that we must go beyond our faith-relationship with Him as God Incarnate in the man Jesus, to a working-relationship with our living God in the person of the Holy Spirit! Our faith-relationship with Christ is the beginning of all right relationships, yes, but such relationships can become dynamic and real only when we enter into a working-relationship with God the Spirit — the Holy Spirit!

Our faith-relationship with Jesus as the Son of God saves us from lost relationship with God, so that we are now assured of eternal life, yes. But it is only in a working-relationship with the living Christ — the Holy Spirit — that we can be given the love we need to transform our earthly relationships into the exciting, abundant life God wants for us. This alone is our hope!

Many of us are missing this abundant life today, not because we don't have faith in Christ, but simply because we have not gone beyond this faith-relationship to the life-style of a disciple — a daily, working-relationship with our living God. Genuine discipleship must always begin in a faith-

relationship with Jesus the Christ, yes; but it must go on to a working-relationship with the Holy Spirit — the living Christ — for this alone is our hope!

III. Love-relationship with others

This relationship with God must find its fulfillment in a love-relationship with other people. That's the third and final step in straightening out our relationships. It's a move into a genuine love-relationship with other people. It's a move from faith and hope to love.

- The first step is a faith-relationship with Jesus the Christ, who redeems our relationship with God the Father.
- The second is a working-relationship with God the Spirit, our only hope for being the spiritual beings God created us to be.
- The third is a love-relationship with people who share the planet earth with us.

There they are: faith, hope, love. These, according to the Bible, are the three eternal verities in life. Through faith in the Crucified Christ our broken relationship with God is restored and we are redeemed as children of God, so now we can do His will. Through hope in our Living God we can become the spiritual beings we were created to be. Then, through the love of God we can love others and make this earth a heaven instead of a hell. Without the faith-relationship with Jesus as God the Son, no relationship with God is possible. Without the working-relationship with God the Spirit there is no hope for a love-relationship with other people, because God is love and for us to have this love He must first pour His love into our hearts through His Holy Spirit which He gives us (Romans 5:5).

Let's go back a moment to our scripture. Jesus begins by saying that in order to be His disciples we must first put our faith-relationship with Him above all other relationships — even the dearest family relationships. It's not that Jesus doesn't want us to love our family, but just the opposite. He wants us to love our family more — He wants us to love them with a love that is patient and kind, a love that is not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude, a love that does not insist on its own way. He wants us to love with a love that does not see wrong in them, but sees right, a love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. He wants us to love with a love that never ends — God's love. He wants us to love with the only kind of love which will always straighten out our relationships — the same kind of love which caused God to send Jesus to us to save us.

To illustrate this, Jesus tells two short parables, one about counting the cost before building a tower and the second about a king taking counsel before going to war. Then Jesus concludes with this penetrating statement:

“Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; men throw it

away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Lk 14:34-35)

We usually interpret these two parables to mean that we should count the cost before becoming disciples. I wonder if we are right? I wonder if Jesus doesn't really want us to count the cost for rejecting discipleship instead? Think about it: Isn't Jesus really saying: "If you reject this offer for right relationships, you will be like putrid salt — you will be like something which cannot relate to anything! You will be worthless to both God and man!" Isn't that the perfect description of a person out of relationship with God and with his fellow man? He is worthless — he is like putrid salt — fit only for extinction. For he is a man without faith, hope, and love — the only three lasting things in life.

This week as I prayed for our mission conference next week and for the great man of God who will be our principle speaker, Dr. Sam Kamaleson, a native of India, my mind went back ten years to an evangelism meeting in New Orleans when I first heard Dr. Kamaleson speak. In that moving sermon he used an illustration which illustrates perfectly what Jesus is telling us in this 31st discipleship lesson. Of course I can't give it that same native touch that my brother Sam does, for it is set in India; but perhaps you can grasp the truth of it.

Sam says that in his native Madras, India, where he pastored a Methodist Church for many years, most of the people go to the beach for their recreation. Always scattered through the crowd on any given day are dozens of peanut vendors pushing their wheelbarrows of peanuts and peddling their products. One peanut vendor who had been selling peanuts all of his life decided one day to take inventory. After the inventory he stuck out his chest as he read the asset side of the ledger, for he was the Chairman of the Board, President, and Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer of a business. When he read the other side of the ledger his shoulders dropped, for despite the excellent officer his company had it was a bankrupt peanut business! He decided he needed to do something about it.

He pushed his wheelbarrow behind a bush and sat down at a sidewalk cafe to think. While he waited for his order of fish and chips, a fine-looking man dressed immaculately in a gray suit, white shirt and beautiful tie walked up to his table, exuding prosperity. With a broad smile he asked to share the table with the peanut vendor. After sitting down, the prosperous man asked, "What do you do for a living?"

The peanut vendor stuck out his chest and said, "Sir, I am a business man. I am the Chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer of a going business concern." Because the man seemed to be so impressed, the peanut vendor didn't tell him it was a bankrupt peanut business.

Then the prosperous man said, "Sir, it's providential we've met, for I'm looking for a business man exactly like you. How would you like to merge

with me? You've got the know-how and experience and I've got the capital to put you in a great business here; we can go together and be a great success."

The peanut vendor stuck out his chest further, and said: "Sir, you are a stranger, and I don't talk business with strangers."

"Why, of course, I should have introduced myself," the prosperous man said, "but since my picture has been in all of the papers I thought you recognized me. My name is Rockefeller."

Now do you think that peanut vendor jumped up and down with glee and said, "Great! The deal is closed! We are partners!" If you think so, you just don't understand human nature; for deep in the heart of this peanut vendor another voice was speaking and saying to him: "If you merge with this guy he will want to be the chairman and president of the company and you will have to be the vice-president."

He played his role to the hilt. He put on his favorite successful mask, silently stood up, deliberately pushed his chair aside and slowly walked to the door, fully aware that Mr. Rockefeller was giving him his undivided attention. He half-opened the door, drew back his shoulders and said, "Thanks for the offer, I'll think it over." Then he went out to that miserable wheelbarrow again, feeling fully satisfied. He had showed that guy who was really the big man!

For 2,000 years now, God has offered the same deal to bankrupt humanity: He's offered to stake us in life. He's offered to give us the power to become real persons and the ability to live in right relationship with Him and the people around us. He's offered us the best deal we can ever have in this life — the offer of genuine discipleship. The problem is still the same: We'd rather keep our same old image and be bankrupt than to sell out to our Lord and have the limitless resources of heaven itself! We hear the offer with our ears, but go right back to our miserable, bankrupt peanut businesses.

Don't you think it's about time we face up to our bankruptcy and become partners in God's business of right relationships?

Discipleship Lesson #31

As disciples we must have a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ, a working relationship with our Living God, and a love-relationship with other people.

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #31?
2. Name the 3 essential steps we must take to straighten out our relationships.

Search the Scriptures

3. It is only as the love of God flows to us and through us that we are capable of loving others properly. Read the following scriptures and write down what you learn about God's love.

Jn 3:16-17

Eph 2:4-5

Rom 5:5-8

Rom 8:37-39

4. According to Colossians 3:12-14, what is our responsibility concerning this love that God has given us?

Internalize God's Word

5. Read I Corinthians 13:4-7, substituting the name of Jesus for the word love. Then copy the passage below, substituting "I" for the word love (changing verbs and pronouns as necessary), and prefacing it with these words from Galatians 2:20:

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me..."

Therefore, _____

Use your paraphrase in Steps in Praying God's Word at least once each day, seeing this word fulfilled in you.

Memory scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Sermon 32: The Heart of a Disciple: An Aching Heart

In both the Old and New Testaments the Bible speaks of our heart as the center of life. *Leb*, the Hebrew word used for heart in the Old Testament, means “that which is in the innermost or hidden part of our being.” The Old Testament speaks of the heart as the seat of such things as wisdom (Proverbs 2:10), trust (3:5), (vigilance) diligence (4:23), understanding (8:5), cheerfulness (15:13), knowledge (15:14), joy (15:30), and prudence (18:15). It speaks of the heart as the seat of evil, too: lust (6:25), deceit (12:20), folly (12:23), bitterness (14:10), pride (16:5) and envy (23:17).

In the New Testament, Jesus emphasizes our heart in the same way, as the very center of our being. He says that it is the pure in heart who shall see God (Matthew 5:8), and that to those who believe in him, “*Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:38). Likewise, Jesus says that sin is first committed in the heart before becoming an outward act (Matthew 5:28), and that evil thoughts, words and acts always begin in the heart (Matthew 15:19).

Paul emphasizes the centrality of the heart even more: fifteen times Paul says that the heart is the center of life itself; thirteen times he says that the heart is the seat of our emotions, both good and bad; eleven times he refers to the heart as the seat of our intellect and reason; and, another thirteen times he tells us our heart is the seat of our will and volition — the decisions we make.

When the Bible tells us that God seeks to reach the heart of man, it means that God is seeking to change us in the innermost center of our being. A central theme running through the Bible is God’s desire to purify and sanctify man’s heart, so man will think right, feel right, decide right, speak right and act right. The Bible says that Jesus came to cleanse and renew our hearts that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Is it any wonder that in His final journey with His disciples, Jesus tells them (and us) what the heart of a disciple must be like and how to get such a heart? He does it in the most precious chapter in the Bible, the 15th chapter of Luke which contains the parables of *The Lost Sheep*, *The Lost Coin* and *The Lost Sons* — the Prodigal and his elder brother. This morning I want us to look at only the first two of these parables — *The Lost Sheep* and *The Lost Coin* to see what the heart of a disciple must be like. Later we will look at *The Prodigal Son* to see how we get such a heart and The Elder Brother to see why we miss this new heart that God has for us.

Jesus says that when we become His disciples He creates in us a new heart, and in this 32nd discipleship lesson, illustrated by the parables of *The Lost Sheep* and *The Lost Coin*, Jesus tells us exactly what this new heart is like.

Scripture

Luke 15:1-10

Text

Rejoice with me
for I have found my
sheep which was lost
... rejoice with me,
for I have found the
coin which I had lost.
Luke 15:6b and 9b

I. A heart that aches for the lost

First, He says, it is a heart that literally aches for the lost! Notice this shepherd who loses one sheep out of his fold of one hundred. He is concerned about all his sheep, but his heart aches for the one who is lost. It's the same with the woman who lost one of her ten coins. She cares about all of the coins, but her heart aches for the one coin which is lost in the dirt.

Note something else about this lost sheep and lost coin, too, and you can understand better the heart of this shepherd and this woman. In both cases, that which is lost is something very close and very precious to them and not something strange or foreign to them. So often when we speak of the lost we think about some unknown person out there who has never known Christ or some heathen over there who has never heard the gospel. Of course, we should be concerned about every person knowing Christ and hearing the gospel, but that's not what Jesus is talking about here. Rather, Jesus is talking about those who are close to home, who are the most precious and dear to us, but who still get lost. He's talking about a sheep that is safely in the fold, but then strays off. He's talking about a coin that is safely in the hand, secure, but then slips through your fingers into the dirt in your own home. This entire 15th chapter of Luke is about something or someone who is very precious and dear that gets lost. Not only is this true of the sheep and coin, but the Prodigal Son also got lost despite his good home, and the Elder Brother got lost despite the love and attention of his father. Jesus is saying, "Disciple, here is what your heart must be like; that is, what you must be like in your innermost being when those who are most precious and dear to you get lost."

What Jesus really wants us to see is this: despite all God does, despite all Christ has done, and despite all family, friends, or church can do, some people still get lost! By "lost" the Bible means "to be out of touch with" or "to be separated from" those with whom we are supposed to be in meaningful relationships. To be lost means to be cut off from the main stream. To be lost means to lose your meaningful relationship both with God and with the meaningful others in your life. Until we accept this truth we cannot have a heart that truly aches for the lost. Otherwise, we'll have a condemning heart or a judgmental heart. We'll either condemn ourselves because a child or a mate or someone else meaningful to us gets lost, or we'll judge that person because he or she is lost. Jesus doesn't call us as disciples to condemn ourselves when another gets lost, nor does He call us to judge the lost. Rather, Jesus calls us to cleanse and renew our own hearts, so that, like the shepherd and the woman in our parables, our hearts literally ache for the lost!

A father and mother rear their child carefully. They surround him with a good clean atmosphere; they cherish him with love, they pray for him at his cradle, and teach him to pray and to be upright and good. They

take him to church with them. Despite all of this, strange things begin to sprout up in that child's life. Like Jesus' parable about the wheat and the weeds, it's as if a shadowy figure crept through their precious field under cover of night, and in the morning they wake up to find weeds mixed with the wheat! Strange things begin to happen to the child as the weeds grow. Look at those weeds growing side-by-side with the wheat, growing so close together that it's impossible to tell the difference: rebellion and independence, selfishness and ambition, immorality and freedom, deception and love.

It does no good to condemn yourself for those weeds, for that won't kill them out; it just fertilizes them! It does no good to be so judgmental of those weeds that they are all you can see. No! A true disciple neither condemns nor judges; rather, he knows there is hope because he knows that Jesus Christ is like a good shepherd tramping over hill and valley searching for that lost sheep. He knows that Jesus Christ is like a determined woman down in the dirt and the filth searching for that lost coin. A true disciple's heart literally aches for the lost so much that he never gives up on him.

II. A heart that never gives up on the lost

That's the second characteristic of a disciple's heart: he has a heart that never gives up on the lost! All across our nation today American families are scattered and torn asunder because many of us no longer have this enduring quality in our hearts. This is exactly what the Bible says will happen when a people's heart grows cold. It says that families will then be scattered — broken apart. We see it all around us. It has happened to many of us. One member strays or is dropped into the dirt, and the other members of the family give up on him. Another family is broken and scattered because hearts have grown cold. The problem in the American home today is the loss of a love that never gives up on the lost. The problem in the American home today is substituting a humanistic conditional love for the unconditional love of Jesus Christ. We love if a mate, or a parent, or a child, or a brother or sister lives up to our standards. If they don't, we refuse to love them and just write them off!

What a far cry this is from the Bible's description of the love found in a disciple's heart described in the 13th chapter of I Corinthians where Paul lists the fifteen characteristics of unconditional Christian love. Did you ever notice that Paul begins and ends the list with the same characteristics? He begins like this: "*Love is patient ...*" (I Corinthians 13:4). He ends like this: "*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends*" (I Corinthians 13:7-8). What does Paul mean by putting so much emphasis on this one characteristic of love — this tenacious quality in Christian love? It's because he wants to impress indelibly upon our hearts this one truth: genuine love never gives up! Read the 13th

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chapter of I Corinthians with this in mind, and you will see that this is the one overriding thought throughout the chapter: genuine Christian love is the one thing in this world which never gives up. Everything else in the world either loses patience or has no durability, but genuine Christian love hangs in there, it keeps on when everything else stops, it never gives up! That's why it is so powerful and redeeming.

Read all of this letter to the Corinthians and you will soon detect that the Christians in Corinth have lost confidence in themselves, they have given up, they have no patience with one another, they are no longer hanging in there, they are dropping by the wayside — giving up. Despite all of this, Paul has not lost confidence in them. He hasn't given up! Paul has much more confidence in the Corinthians than they have in themselves. Why? Because Paul has hold of a truth that the Corinthians have not yet grasped. Oh, how we need to get hold of this truth in America today!

Not long ago a husband said to me, "I've just lost all of my love for my wife." I looked at him, smiled, and said: "Don't worry about it, you really haven't lost anything of value!" He looked shocked. Then I said, "What you've lost you should have lost a long time ago, so you can find the real thing. You can never lose genuine love, for it is the one thing in this world which never ends — which never gives up! What you've lost is a cheap substitute for the real thing, and that's good. Maybe now you can find the real thing — genuine unconditional love which never ends!"

How durable is your love? Is yours a love that never gives up, or is it simply a cheap substitute for the real thing? Is yours a love that can endure all things or is it conditional? If we are going to be disciples who are capable of bringing the lost back into the fold we must first fill our hearts with a love that never gives up on the lost!

Let me illustrate. When we get married we take a vow to love each other "until death do us part," but we all know that for many of us this is an empty vow. That's obvious for those who end up in the divorce court, but how about for those of us who are still living together as husband and wife? We took the same vow. Is Paul describing our love when he says, "*Love is patient ... love endures all things. Love never ends*"?

How many of us have given up on a brother or a sister or a parent or a child because they didn't measure up to our standards? How many of us have lost meaningful relationships because we have substituted our conditional love for the real thing?

III. A heart that grows more loving with use

One final point about a disciple's heart: you can have the heart of a disciple only if you use it regularly. Or, to say it another way: a disciple's heart is a heart that grows more loving with use. Better still may be the words of medical science: "use it or lose it." The Bible says in the first few verses of

Romans 5 that when we accept Christ God gives us a new heart,

“because God’s love has been poured into our hearts [that is, into our inner being] through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us”
(Rom 5:5).

When a Christian honestly and sincerely accepts Christ he receives a new heart full of the unconditional love of Christ. Then why doesn’t it show in the way we live in our families and with the meaningful others around us? The Bible’s answer is clear: When we don’t use it, we lose it! In his book, ***Getting Older and Staying Younger***, Dr. D. D. Stonecypher, Jr, a specialist in geriatrics, tells us the same truth. Listen to a startling statement by this expert in the field of aging:

“Nobody at the current life-span is actually dying from old age ... The truth is aging causes no diseases — it merely causes a loss of our reserve ... and this makes us more subject to disease.” (Pages 29 & 23)

This happens, Dr. Stonecypher says, not because of age itself, but because we do not use what we have and it deteriorates. He further claims that “a perfectly normal old age is healthy, just as a perfectly normal childhood is healthy” (p. 29). Then, after citing dozens of illustrations of this truth, he goes into detail about how to use what we have in order to keep our bodies vigorous, our minds alert, and our social relationships alive. Modern experts in cardiovascular diseases tell us exactly the same thing. When we exercise and use our heart it grows stronger and our vascular system remains young and flexible.

Jesus, the Great Physician, is telling us the same truth about our innermost being — about the heart of a disciple. He is saying, “Use it or lose it!” The problem is many of us expect God to make us into mature Christians without doing our part, just as we expect God to keep us healthy and give us long life without doing our part. That is never God’s way! That would make a flabby, weak people and God needs a strong, durable people who can face a cross and be victorious! God needs a people with staying power against an enemy who will stop at nothing to make the heart of man cold and turned toward evil!

Jesus is telling us that just as we are born with a physical heart that we must properly care for if it is to grow strong and function right, so are we given a new heart when we are born again and become a Christian. Jesus says that is only the beginning; what happens after that is up to us. Jesus is telling us that it is up to us to nurture this new heart and develop it into the heart of a disciple. If we don’t, we shall soon fall back into all of the old habit patterns of “the natural man.” If we don’t use our new heart, we will lose it!

Fortunately, the Bible tells us how to nurture and develop our new heart into the heart of a disciple. The Bible calls this way “discipline in the means

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of grace,” and certainly we Methodist Christians should understand this, for no person emphasized this truth of the gospel more than John Wesley! The words “disciple” and “discipline” come from the same root word, and “discipline in the means of grace” is absolutely essential to get “the heart of a disciple.” What are these disciplines?

- **Discipline In Prayer** — Daily drawing aside with God to permit Him to pour His love into our hearts. Daily confessing our shortcomings and our inability to break with the old habit patterns of the natural man, so we can receive God’s forgiveness and God’s power.
- **Discipline in worship** — Weekly drawing aside with other worshipers to worship and praise God, to hear God’s Word to us, to partake of the Sacraments, and to let God empower us for another week. Weekly worship is essential to get our lives moving in the rhythm of God’s Creation and to get our hearts beating like a disciple’s heart. Receive from God — give to others; receive — give, receive — give! That’s the way a disciple’s heart beats!
- **Discipline in Bible study** — A systematic study of the scriptures under a competent leader who accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God to man. How else can you know God’s ways as opposed to man’s ways? How else can you know what God expects from you and what you can expect from God? It is essential to systematically hide God’s Word in your heart that you might not sin against Him! You can do this only through disciplined systematic Bible study.
- **Discipline in receiving Holy Communion** — not merely as religious ritual, but to actually nourish our hearts with the power and love of the Crucified and Resurrected Christ, as surely as we nourish our bodies with food and drink each day.
- **Discipline in Christian fellowship** — All of us need a small group of other Christians who know our hurts and pains and our joys and victories well enough both to hurt with us and to rejoice with us. We need others who love us enough to reprove us when we need reproof and to cry with us and comfort us when we need comfort.

If you have accepted Christ, but you know that because of your own thoughts, actions and words you do not yet have the heart of a disciple, then our Lord is speaking to you in this 32nd discipleship lesson, when He says:

Discipleship Lesson #32

To get a disciple’s heart that aches for the lost and never gives up on them, you must systematically discipline yourself in using the means of grace: prayer, worship, Bible study, Holy Communion, and Christian fellowship.

That’s it! The key to a disciple’s heart is to use it, and the key to using it right is discipline in the means of grace. Pray, worship, study the Bible,

receive communion, and fellowship with others Christians with this prayer in your heart:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps 51:10).

If you do you shall certainly be blessed as our Lord promised:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8).

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Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #32?
2. List the characteristics of a disciple's heart mentioned in this sermon.
3. How do we nurture and develop our new heart into the heart of a disciple?

Search the Scriptures

4. God is seeking to change us in our innermost being, therefore He gives us a new heart. Why doesn't God "fix-up" our old heart?

Jer 17:9

Ezek 36:26-27

5. What can we do to cooperate with God in His process of creating in us a clean heart?

Prov 4:23

Internalize God's Word

6. Let the Holy Spirit use the parables in Luke 15:3-10 to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb 4:12). Ask Him to help you find answers to the following questions as you pray God's Word:

Do I have a disciple's heart? Do I want one?

Does my heart ache for the lost, especially for those closely related to me?

Is my love conditional? What are my conditions? Have I given up on anyone in my intimate circle of family and friends?

Do I take good care of my heart? Do I nurture it with food, exercise, and rest through disciplined use of the means of grace?

Prayer | Worship | Bible Study | Holy Communion | Christian Fellowship

Memory scripture: Romans 5:5

Sermon 33: The Heart of a Disciple: A Servant's Heart

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is like a flawless diamond. No matter from which point you view it, you will always see new beauty and new riches that you haven't seen before. As we look at this parable from the perspective of Jesus' teachings on discipleship we see that Jesus is telling us about the very heart of discipleship. This is the theme of all three parables in Luke 15. In the parables of *The Lost Sheep* and *The Lost Coin*, we saw that the first function of a disciple's heart is to ache for the lost. In teaching us the second function of a disciple's heart in *The Parable of The Prodigal Son*, Jesus shows us four eternal truths about freedom:

1. Our need for freedom
2. The dangers of freedom
3. The right way to use our freedom
4. The rewards or blessings of the right use of freedom

I. Our need for freedom

"Man was born to be free" is not simply a slogan to be mouthed, but it is a basic truth inherent in Creation and is a fundamental foundation of our faith. It is one of the first truths revealed to us in the Bible, in the story of Adam and Eve where God gives man and woman total freedom in His garden paradise. Man is free to eat from every tree and to decide what to do and what not to do, but with this freedom of choice God also gives us one warning. He warns us, "*If you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall die!*" God is not restricting our freedom; He is warning us against misusing it. We are still free to choose to eat the deadly fruit, but if we do, we must suffer the tragic consequences.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, for first we need to establish our basic premise that we all need freedom. This is a basic need. "We were born to be free," and without this freedom, we can't mature, we can't reach our potential in life, and we can't be genuine disciples for our Lord.

In our parable, the younger son recognizes this truth when he goes to his father and flatly declares this need in his life: "Dad," he says, "I'm tired of being told what to do. I want to try it on my own. Give me what belongs to me and let me try my own wings. I'm leaving the nest." This young man is simply putting into words something we all must say at sometime or other, if we ever grow up: "Dad, I want to be independent! Mother, I want to do it myself!"

This is the first crisis point for all of us on the road to maturity, and it is a ticklish and dangerous time for both parent and child. As parents we can

Scripture

Luke 15:11-24

Text

"But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father'... And he arose and came to his father."

Luke 15:17, 18, & 20

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learn a lot from the father in our parable. Notice he didn't argue with the boy. He didn't try to reason with him. He simply let him go. A wise parent will recognize this basic need for freedom and help his child handle it. A wise parent will also warn his child as he grows up about the poison fruit which he must not eat! He will do this so that when the child reaches this first crisis point and says, "I must try it on my own," he can be as wise as the father in our parable and let him go without breaking relationship and making it impossible to have reconciliation.

However, as a discipleship lesson, Jesus does not tell this story from the viewpoint of the parent, but from the viewpoint of the son. It's into the skin of this young man that we must crawl; he is the one who is struggling with this great need to be free. He is the one who must deal with one of life's most important questions: "How do I handle my God-given freedom?"

II. The dangers of freedom

Have you ever thought about what God was risking when He gave us freedom of choice? Again, God tells us in the first story in the Bible what He is risking. He is risking what's most important to Him of all His creation: the lives of those He created in His own image! God must take this risk in order for you and me to mature and be able to relate to Him as His co-workers here on earth. We must risk if our children are to mature and relate to us as adults and achieve their purpose in life.

Without a doubt, the most agonizing time in parents' lives is facing up squarely to this first crisis point with their children. The parents see both the little child who is still there and the man or woman who is struggling to break out. Then they hear those inevitable words: "Mom — Dad, I must try my own wings. I am leaving the nest." You see, Mom and Dad know what's out there; they've been there! They know that death itself is just waiting to stalk such an easy prey, and they can't keep from agonizing about it.

There I go again, thinking like a parent instead of taking the viewpoint of this young man. Let's see if we can understand this young man with his new freedom. He's gone to the city and he's "living it up." Now, don't knock it, for if you're really inside of his skin, you know it's very exciting there. He's meeting new people. He's experimenting with new things. I can still remember when the country boy standing in this pulpit first tried his hand at living it up in the city. Believe me, it was exciting! It was so exciting that I began doing the same thing this young man did: burning the candle at both ends! Of course, the same thing happened to me that happened to him: I ran out of resources, I squandered my substance! I wasted my living!

That's the real danger that Jesus wants us to see — the danger that we will use our freedom to waste our resources, to squander our substance! This

is what happened to the Prodigal, and this is what will happen to every one who misuses his freedom! Of course, there can be only one end if this continues, and that end is death!

The trouble with the young man in our story was that he thought freedom meant doing what he pleased, but this meant he was being ruled by his feelings. He was in bondage! He was right in realizing his need for freedom, but he was wrong in the way he used it. Many of us still think like that. When we use our freedom just to do as we please, it always leads to bondage and ultimately death. Freedom becomes true freedom only when we use it to do as God pleases, according to His created order! We were born to be free so that we could do as God pleases and become the person He intends for us to be.

Only when we do as God pleases can He be our resource — our source of love, wisdom, and power. Only when we use our freedom to be a co-worker with God can He supply the kind of resources He intends for us to have. When the Prodigal “lived it up” in the far country this is what he squandered — this is the substance he wasted. He wasted his source of love, of wisdom, and of power. That’s the danger we all face in using our freedom of choice. We face the danger of using it to squander our substance — to waste our living!

When we do, then just like this young man, we begin to substitute cheap synthetics for the real thing. We begin to substitute our impulsive whims for God’s immutable laws. We substitute cheap sensuality for genuine love. We substitute our rationalizing and finite knowledge for revealed and eternal truth. We substitute anger, resentments and bitterness for honest relationships. We substitute busyness for fulfillment. Thus cut off from our source of real life there can be only one end: we must perish! Jesus uses the perfect figure of speech for this condition. He says it’s like living in a pig sty and eating with the pigs! It’s living like the lowest of animals instead of like a human being created in the image of God! That’s the danger we all face in using our God-given freedom.

III. The right way to use our freedom

Jesus tells us the right way to use our God-given freedom through the words of the Prodigal Son:

“But when the prodigal came to himself, he said ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father’” (Lk 15:17,18).

He did arise and go; listen to his first words to his father:

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants” (vs. 18-19).

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What does the Bible mean when it says “he came to himself?” It means that for the first time he saw things right — for the first time he saw the truth and knew “that the truth would make him free.” How did he come to himself? Get inside the boy’s skin and feel with him and each stage of this transformation will be real for you.

- First, he came to himself by recognizing that he was substituting cheap synthetics for the real thing.
- Next, he came to himself by seeing he was doing this because he had a rebellious heart.
- Then, he came to himself by realizing that it was this rebellious heart which actually drove him to the pig sty to perish.
- Finally, he came to himself by acknowledging that if he really wanted to live instead of die he had to have a change of heart!

What was that change of heart? Speak the words of the text with him and it becomes apparent:

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”

There it is! There is his change of heart. He changed a rebellious heart into a servant’s heart. When this young man came to himself he saw that, paradoxically, it takes a servant’s heart to live life and live it abundantly! He saw that it takes a servant’s heart to be God’s son. It takes a servant’s heart to live in God’s kingdom. It takes a servant’s heart to be a true disciple of our Lord! This is what really happened that caused this young man to come to himself: He saw the importance of a servant’s heart. This is what our Lord wants us to see as we look at the difference in this young man when he returns home.

- He leaves home trying to get everything he can get. He returns home eager to give everything he can give.
- He leaves home insisting upon being in the center of life. He returns home insisting upon serving Him who is the center of life.
- He leaves home dead set on being first. He returns home knowing that true greatness comes only in serving Him who is first.

Now, turn the pages of the Gospels with me and you will see that this is the one message which Jesus repeats the most: “If you would be greatest of all, you must be servant of all.” “If you would be first, you must be last.” “I am among you as the one who serves,” says Jesus, “and if you would follow me, you must likewise serve.” This is our discipleship lesson — one of the most important lessons in the Bible:

Discipleship Lesson #33

To be a true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ we must have a servant’s heart.

A disciple's heart must function as a servant's heart. Why is this true? Look at our parable again from inside the skin of this young man and you will see why.

IV. The blessings of right use of freedom

God's blessings are always a by-product of using our freedom right! Our blessings come as a by-product of having a servant's heart. It's apparent that there was no way this boy could be blessed by his father while he was still out in the far country. Actually, there was no way he could have been blessed even while he stayed home if he kept his rebellious heart. The truth is, the only way he could be blessed was to come to himself and have a change of heart. Only in this way was he truly open to the blessings of his father. Only in this way are we open to God's blessings too!

Look at what happens when the boy returns home with a servant's heart. His father shouts: "Let's celebrate! Let's celebrate, for this my son was dead, but now he's alive — now he lives like he's supposed to live. Now his heart is functioning right!"

Mark Twain once said, "The churches are full, but the people are empty," which was simply his picturesque way of saying that the lives of Christians often do not reflect the joyous, new life they profess. Why? Simply because many of our hearts are not functioning right — many of us who profess Christ have never really had this change of heart. Many of us have not used our God-given freedom right. We've used it to make the wrong choices with self in the center of life, instead of using it to put Christ in the center. We've used it to flaunt our rebellion, instead of using it to become the person God wants us to be. Many of us need to come to ourselves and do the same four things that the Prodigal did:

- We need to recognize that we are substituting some very cheap synthetics for the real thing.
- We need to come to ourselves and see that we are doing this because we have a rebellious heart.
- We need to come to ourselves and realize that it is really our rebellious heart that is keeping us from being blessed by God.
- We need to come to ourselves and acknowledge that if we truly want to live instead of perish we must have a change of heart!

To find life as it is meant to be we must come to ourselves, and rise and go to our Father with a servant's heart. Then, as a by-product of this servant's heart God can shower us with His blessings. When we offer ourselves to Christ to truly serve Him, rather than to get for ourselves, then and only then can He begin to equip us for service. The point is no one can be equipped for discipleship without a servant's heart. This is why Jesus tells us in this 33rd discipleship lesson that:

Discipleship Lesson #33

To be a true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ we must have a servant's heart.

In this, "The Greatest Story Ever Told," Jesus is saying to all of us: "Yes, you are born to be free. Whether you are using this freedom right or wrong depends upon the condition of your heart — whether your heart is functioning right." Jesus tells this great story to motivate all of us to have our hearts examined. For heart trouble is not only the greatest killer physically; it is the greatest killer spiritually, too. Jesus is saying to all of us "Be wise, have a heart check-up!"

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #33?
2. Name the four eternal truths about freedom a disciple must internalize.

Search the Scriptures

3. Read the following Scriptures, note the person teaching or modeling servanthood, and write down some of the characteristics of a servant's heart.

Num 12:1-16

1 Cor 9:19-23

Mk 10:35-45

Jn 13:1-17

Internalize God's Word

4. Read Philippians 2:5-11 and answer the following questions.
What mind (attitude) are we instructed to have? (vs 5)
Describe this mind by rewriting verses 6-8 in your own words.
How did the Father bless His Servant Son? (vss 9-11)
How will He bless you if you have a servant's heart?
5. Pray Galatians 5:13, asking the Holy Spirit to show you how you are using your freedom.

Memory scripture: Galatians 5:13

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Sermon 34: The Heart of a Disciple: A Charitable Heart

When we looked at the first half of what has been called *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*, we saw that a disciple must have a servant's heart — Discipleship Lesson #33. As we look at the Elder Brother in the last half of this great story, we find Discipleship Lesson #34. The strange thing about this story is that the son you expect to be lost is actually the one who is saved; and the son you expect to be saved is actually the one who is lost.

I. The Problem

The younger son has many character traits we normally think of as bad. He is a spendthrift, a carouser, irresponsible, lazy, runs with the wrong crowd — and yet he is saved. Why? Because he comes to himself, repents, and returns home with a servant's heart. The Elder Brother, who stays home, has many character traits we admire. He is a hard worker, moral, thrifty, temperate, obedient, patient and runs with the right crowd — but he is lost! Why? Because he never has a change of heart, that's why. You see, both boys have rebellious hearts. The rebellion of the Prodigal drives him into the far country, into the loose living of a sensual heart, while the rebellion of the Elder Brother drives him deeper inside of himself into the self-centeredness of an uncharitable heart.

The basic sin of both is the same; only the symptoms are different. The basic sin is rebellion. The symptom of the one is sensuality; the symptom of the other is a hard heart, an uncharitable heart. Jesus wants us to see that this is true for all of us. Our basic sin is the same: a rebellious heart, rebellion against God. It's wanting to do it our own way instead of God's way, wanting to be in control ourselves instead of submitting to the will of our heavenly Father. That's what the Bible always means by sin. It means a rebellious heart and it's the same rebellious heart whether it manifests itself in sensuality like the Prodigal, or self-centeredness like the Elder Brother. The point is that neither son is better or worse than the other! Both have the same disease and the disease is deadly for both, even though the symptoms are more obvious in one than the other. The rebellious heart of the Prodigal drives him into the far country where he is cut off from his father, his family, and his resources. He squanders his substance, wastes his living, and eventually lives and eats with the pigs. His sensuality causes him to live and act like an animal. The rebellious heart of the Elder Brother drives him farther into himself, until he is cut off from his father, his family, and his resources. Although he is surrounded by wealth, he lives like an imprisoned pauper. Look at the Elder Brother closely and you'll see that his situation is as intolerable as

Scripture

Luke 15:25-32

Text

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!"

Luke 15:28-30

the Prodigal's, if not more so, for his hard, uncharitable heart cuts him off from the three most important things in life.

An uncharitable heart cuts us off from God.

Of course, the father in this story represents God, and the two sons represent the two ways that we rebel against God and cut ourselves off from Him. We either do it defiantly and openly with sensuality, like the Prodigal, or we do it inwardly and secretly with uncharity, like the Elder Brother. No matter which way we do it the result is the same: we cut ourselves off from God and His blessings. The younger son deliberately and openly defied his father and struck out on his own, cutting himself off from his father and his father's blessings. The Elder Brother openly acknowledged his allegiance to his father, but inwardly tried to usurp his father's authority by playing God and sitting in judgment of both his father and his brother. He, too, cut himself off from his father and his father's blessings. The difference is that the younger boy realized his predicament, came to himself, repented, returned home, and accepted his father's authority and blessings. The older boy did not!

This is why inner rebellion is often much more deadly than open rebellion. It makes our hearts hard and cold. It makes us uncharitable. It causes us to play games with ourselves. Outwardly, we stay home and put up a good front, but inwardly we are a thousand miles beyond that far country because inwardly we set ourselves up as judge of both God and other people! Inward rebellion always leads us to be judgmental, because that's the only way we can justify our own bitterness, self-pity, resentments and hostility.

This is why from beginning to end the Bible shouts, "Leave all judgment to God." We must leave all judgment to God because we don't have His eternal perspective. We don't have His heart. We don't have His grace, His love and His mercy. We don't have His charity. Because of this, like the Elder Brother, our judgment of others must always be justified by building ourselves up and tearing others down. Of course, such justification of ourselves causes us to close our eyes to our own sin and prevents us from ever seeking and receiving forgiveness because our uncharitable heart has separated us from God. And that's only the beginning.

An uncharitable heart cuts us off from the meaningful others in our lives.

An uncharitable heart not only cuts us off from God; it also cuts us off from our family, our friends, our fellow church members and our co-workers. Look at this Elder Brother. What a lonely, pathetic person he is. See him standing outside by himself, pouting, eaten up with anger, bitterness, self-pity, resentments, scorn, malice and hostility. Only two people even speak to him: the servant he calls to him, who has no choice and can't help himself, and his father, who represents God and never gives up on anyone.

Everyone else ignores him! Why? Because his uncharitable heart has cut him off from them, that's why! It always does!

When we rebel against God and set ourselves up as judge of others, it won't be long until we cut ourselves off from all the meaningful people in our lives. They can't bear to be around us. Think of the people you know who try to "play God" and make themselves your judge. Think of those you know who always find fault and have no charity for your mistakes. Do you really like them? Don't you avoid them when you can? An uncharitable heart always cuts us off from the meaningful others in our lives.

An uncharitable heart cuts off from revealed truth.

Also, an uncharitable heart cuts us off from the truth God has revealed to us in the gospel. It cuts us off from revealed truth, because it cuts us off from the supernatural. In order to justify ourselves for our uncharitable hearts and our harsh judgment of others, we must twist the good news of the gospel into the bad news of humanism. Look at the Elder Brother:

- First note how *he substitutes moralism for morality*. That is, he sets up a set of rules to live by instead of opening his life to God's righteousness through grace. Without charity this always happens.
- Next, notice how *he substitutes legalism for service*. That is, instead of serving "to give," now he serves "to get" for himself. He now looks at service as "a system of rewards" which he deserves. Without charity this always happens.
- Look at how *he puts his faith and trust in himself and his good works, instead of in God's grace* as revealed by Jesus Christ--and without faith there is no way he can receive the truth of the Gospel, for the Bible is clear that we must receive God's grace and truth through faith. Without charity this always happens.
- Then notice how *he substitutes dull duty for faithful obedience*. Duty is forcing ourselves to try to live up to what Christ says without sharing the power and love of his Spirit. It's drudgery. It's impossible. Obedience, however, is moving and having our being in the power and stream of the Spirit of Christ.

Step-by-step the Elder Brother has separated himself from the truth of the gospel as revealed in Christ, until he is living a lie and missing the abundant life altogether. Jesus wants us to see that this must be the end for those who rebel inwardly and let their hearts grow hard and uncharitable. Without God's love all that is left for us is humanism — a religion of man's works instead of God's grace. The sad fact is, like the Elder Brother, the sicker we get with the disease of humanism the more self-righteous we feel. The Elder Brother's sin is often called "the malady of the members" or "the vice of the virtuous," because it is so subtle and strikes only those who stay home and play games, deceiving themselves.

II. God's Answer

The good news is, there is an answer for this inner rebellion that makes us so uncharitable. God gives us His three-fold answer in this parable. The answer is found in the words of the father, who of course, represents God in this story. Notice first the encounter of the father and the Elder Brother in verse 28. We are told in the first half of this verse that the Elder Brother *"was angry and refused to go in."* That's the picture of his uncharitable heart. Then, in the last half of this verse we are told this: *"His father came out and entreated him."* There's God's answer: God takes the initiative to redeem us from our own worst selves.

Step 1

The word which is here translated "entreated" is used often in the New Testament, but most of the other times it is translated as "exhorted," "beseeched" or even "begged." When we looked at the Gift of Exhortation in our study of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, we saw that an exhorter is one who "strongly urges others to live by faith and earnestly advises them how to do it." This is exactly what the father is doing here. He is strongly urging his eldest son to change his heart, so he can move from a do-it-yourself religion to a life of faith, and he earnestly advises him exactly how to do it. He is telling him that the first step is to come to himself and see himself as he really is. The first step is to look at ourselves honestly.

Here, the father pleads with — entreats — his eldest son to look at himself honestly and see what his hard, uncharitable heart is doing to him. He wants all of us to do the same. He sent Christ to tell us so. He wants all of us to look deep into our own hearts and honestly see the hardness and lack of charity there. He wants us to own up honestly to how we feel when, for example, God blesses an old reprobate who comes in from the far country more than he does us — the ones who have stayed home all through the years. He wants us to see how we react when others, not nearly so loyal and faithful as we, get the attention and praise while we do the work. He wants us to acknowledge how judgmental we are of the worldly, sensual sinner even as we rationalize and excuse our own anger, resentments, self-pity, bitterness, self-centeredness and hostility. What do you see when you look into your own heart today?

In the story of the Elder Brother, Jesus is painting a picture of every person who has not permitted our Lord to sanctify his heart. He is showing us what inner rebellion does to us. What do you see when you look into your own heart? Do you see compassion and charity? Do you see joy when gross sinners are blessed? Or, do you view it like the Elder Brother — with anger, self-pity, resentments and bitterness? How do you feel about the other members of your family who are different from you? Have you honestly tried to understand them? Or, has your heart grown hard and uncharitable toward them?

When we look into our own hearts honestly, none of us come out one hundred per cent clean and pure, do we? All of us must admit we still have far to go to get the charitable heart that Jesus wants for His disciples. Don't fret over that, for recognizing this fact is the first step in getting a charitable heart.

Step 2

Let's move on to the second step. After the father entreats his elder son to come to himself, and the son responds by spewing venom at his younger brother, his father says this to him: *"Son ... all that is mine is yours."* By this he means that he is offering this Elder Brother all of his grace. He is offering him total reconciliation on all levels. He is offering him a charitable heart. The second step in exchanging our uncharitable heart for a charitable heart is to acknowledge our need for God's grace.

"All that is mine is yours!" is God's promise to all of us! That's God's grace! These first two steps define what the Bible means when it says that the Prodigal came to himself. That is, first, he saw himself honestly as being separated from God, from those meaningful persons in his life, and from truth. Then, he saw that only by the grace of his Father could that separation be ended and he become the person he was meant to be. These are the two things that the Elder Brother refused to do. He refused to look at himself honestly and he refused to acknowledge his need for the grace of his Father.

Step 3

Consequently, he was unable to take that third step which Jesus reveals to us in the final verse of this story, verse 32, when the father says:

"[Son, come to yourself and see that] it was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found."

Here, the father is pleading with his eldest son to see his younger brother as he, the father, sees him. That is the only way any of us can have a charitable heart: we must begin to see others — everyone else — through the eyes of God! The problem is that it is possible to see others through the eyes of God only after we have taken the first two steps.

- First, we must look at ourselves honestly and turn our back on our uncharitable heart.
- Then, we must acknowledge that only God's grace as given to us in Jesus Christ can change our uncharitable heart into a charitable heart.

You see, the first step is what the Bible calls "confession and repentance," and the second is what the Bible calls "faith." Jesus says this is always our part in changing into the persons He wants us to be, whether we are in the

far country or at home. Remember these were His first words in the first chapter of Mark:

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

Repent and believe! That’s the formula Jesus gives for change. To change, He says we must first own up to our own sin and then trust Him to do something about it. This is our Lord’s answer for the sin of the Elder Brother as well as for the sin of the Prodigal son. The answer is a change of heart, and only the living Christ can change our hearts! Whether it is a sensual heart like the Prodigal’s or an uncharitable heart like the Elder Brother’s, only the living Christ can change it, and the Bible says He will change it anytime we repent and believe!

How will He change it? He will change it, the Bible says, by giving us His heart. Paul refers to this process 172 times in his letters as being “in Christ” and Christ being “in us.” By this he means that when we honestly invite Christ, by faith, to exercise Lordship over our heart He will do just that. When we offer our bodies to Him as a temple for His Holy Spirit, He will abide in us and be our righteousness and our love. Then, we can begin to see others through the eyes of God, because we see them with the heart of Christ Himself.

This is what Christianity is all about. This Story has been called “The Greatest Story Ever Told” because it is the clearest picture in the Bible of the heart of God and the heart that Christ offers to every disciple. It’s a healthy heart, functioning perfectly in the three ways it is supposed to function:

- It is an aching heart that never gives up on the lost and does what needs to be done that the lost may be found by God.
- It is a servant’s heart that does not exist to be served but lives to serve; for only in giving can we truly know and receive God’s grace.
- It is a charitable heart — and that’s our 34th discipleship lesson.

Discipleship Lesson #34

A disciple must have a charitable heart that sees others as Christ sees them, because Christ abides in him and he abides in Christ.

Did you ever realize that Jesus was unable to finish this Story the way He wanted to, because those who stayed home never had a change of heart while He was on the earth? Of course, Jesus wanted to finish the second part of this Story the same way He finished the first — with rejoicing and celebration over the Elder Brother’s change of heart — but He could not. I wonder how long Jesus will have to wait before He sees this change of heart in those of His children who stayed home? How long He will have to

wait for them to see others with His charity? How long He will have to wait to end this Story with the words like these:

“Come quickly and shower these children with all of My blessings, and let us eat and make merry; for these My children were dead, but are alive again; they were lost, but now are found! Come, let’s celebrate! My children have come to themselves and I have given them new hearts — disciples’ hearts!”

NOTES

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #34?
2. Describe the problem discussed in this sermon and tell how this problem is manifested in each son.
What is God's 3-fold answer for this problem?

Search the Scriptures

3. What does God's Word say concerning our attitude toward others? (Rom 2:1; Lk 6:36-38)
4. What is a result of having bitterness or resentment toward others?
Heb 12:15
Eph 4:30-31
5. In Romans 12:1-2 and Ephesians 4:32-5:2 Paul presents God's answers to the Elder Brother's problem of bitterness and resentment. Restate these answers in your own words.

Internalize God's Word

6. Do you see yourself in either or both of these sons? Explain.
7. What guidance do you find for yourself in either this sermon about the elder son or Sermon #33 about the younger son?
8. Do Paul's suggestions (questions #4, 5, and 6) help you? How?
9. Using Steps in Praying God's Word (Appendix), pray this parable (Luke 15:24-32). Allow yourself to experience your Father God present with you, aware of the most intimate details of your sin problem. Remember: Do not take control of this experience. Allow the Holy Spirit to write the script.

Memory scripture: Romans 2:1

Sermon 35: The Exchange Rate That Matters

In Discipleship Lesson #35, found in the first nine verses of chapter 16 of Luke, Jesus deals with one of the most difficult questions all of us face as Christians: “How should a Christian deal with money?” This scripture is Jesus’ familiar *Parable of The Dishonest Steward*. You remember the story: When this rascal of a steward is caught appropriating his master’s money for himself, he is fired. Having lived an easy life so long he knows he can’t go back to hard labor and he is too proud to beg. Before others hear about his dismissal he uses his trusted position to make shady deals with all of his master’s creditors, taking enough kickbacks for himself to insure his financial security. After telling about this servant’s dishonest and deceitful scheming, our Lord shocks us by concluding the parable with this statement:

“The master commended the dishonest steward for his prudence; for the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations” (Lk 16:8-9).

How can our Lord commend such dishonesty and crooked conniving? How can He say that a deceitful, scheming unfaithful employee is wiser in the use of money than Bible-believing, faithful Christians? How can there be a discipleship lesson in that? Note the words again carefully and you will see that Jesus didn’t commend this crook for his dishonesty; rather, He commended him for his prudence. What is prudence? Prudence is the ability to plan ahead of time — to think before you act! Jesus is simply saying to His followers something like this:

“Look at this rascal who doesn’t even pretend to be a Christian. Look at him and learn a lesson. He’s concerned with nothing but taking care of himself in this world. Look at his prudence, and see how carefully he plans. He knows what he wants his money to do. Through careful planning he manages to exchange his money for earthly, physical security, and I commend him for doing it so well. You who claim to follow me should be just as prudent in dealing with your money! After all, I’ve already told you about ‘the exchange rate that really matters.’ Surely you can be as wise in exchanging your money for eternal treasures, as this scheming, conniving pagan is in exchanging his money for earthly, physical security!”

Jesus wants us to see how a Christian should use his money and how he should plan ahead to do it. In this colorful story Jesus uses shock treatment to drive home this discipleship lesson:

Scripture

Luke 16:1-9

Text

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails that they may receive you into the eternal habitations.

Luke 16:9

Discipleship Lesson #35

A disciple will exchange his money for eternal treasures.

That's "The Exchange Rate That Really Matters:" exchanging our money for eternal treasures. Look at our text again:

"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations" (Lk 16:9).

In the final words of his famous sermon on this text John Wesley admonishes us to use our money in such a way that we may attain eternal life. Wesley understood this truth and the importance of it for he gave this sermon, *The Use of Money*, a special place as the final sermon in his collection *Forty-Four Sermons* which he published as the heart of the Christian faith and required to be read in every Methodist society.

The subject of money is not only the most important subject in the eyes of people who don't even claim to be Christian; it is also important in the eyes of our Lord Himself and in the eyes of completely sold-out Christians like John Wesley. The Bible wants us to see that our money is inextricably bound up with our Christian life, and how we use our money has a direct bearing upon our eternal destiny. Now, that makes money important, doesn't it?

John Wesley says in his famous sermon on money that there are three ironclad rules a Christian must follow in using his money in order to be a faithful steward and to exchange his money for eternal treasures:

"Make all you can!"

"Save all you can!"

"Give all you can!"

Let's apply these three laws to our lives today and see what they mean for us as modern-day Christian disciples.

I. "Make all you can!"

Not only did Jesus commend this dishonest steward for being prudent and making all he could, but in both the *Parable of the Talents* and *Parable of the Pounds* he drives home this truth as His main point. We are not supposed to be drones upon society; we are supposed to work and use our talents to make all that we can! We are created to produce all that we can produce and then to reap the fruit of our labor. This is what it means to be a co-worker with God on earth. This is God's plan for us and any time a people fail to do it they undermine the very structure of society.

It doesn't take a Ph.D. in economics to know what is wrong with our economy in America. Any person who is aware of what has happened to

this biblical work ethic in our nation since World War II knows that the real problem in America today is that too many people want to make more without working more and without producing more. Look at the increase in the number of government employees — they have doubled, tripled, quadrupled. But instead of meaning an increase in service as far as meeting the real needs of American citizens, it has been just the opposite. The more bureaucracy has grown, the more American citizens have suffered from restrictive rules and regulations, resulting in gigantic increase in cost and taxes but deplorable decrease in productivity. This can spell only inflation and ruin!

Our problem is that a whole generation of Americans has tried to ignore this basic law of life. All across our nation today we see people expecting to make more, while they work less and produce less. This is the philosophy continually negotiated into our labor contracts: More pay — less work. More money — but less production! Such philosophy is contrary to God’s creative order and it has caught up with us!

When Jesus lays down this first rule for a Christian and his money, “Make all you can,” He means, “Don’t be a drone on society.” He means, “Do your part by working as hard as you can to produce all that you can, so you will make all that you can!” For that is the only way any country or economy can keep the balance that is needed to stay healthy. Jesus is simply emphasizing the most basic law in all economics: if you want to make money, then work hard and produce what people need! The Word of God is speaking especially to us Americans today, saying, “Ignore this basic law about the work ethic at your peril! Ignore it and you shall surely perish!” God’s first law for a Christian in dealing with money is, “make all you can,” but make it by working as hard as you can and by producing all that you can! Make it by being a hard worker, not by being a drone. This is the way to fulfill God’s plan for our lives and be co-workers with Him here on earth.

II. “Save all you can!”

God’s second law for a Christian in dealing with money is this: “Save all you can!” In our parable, this dishonest rascal made all he could so he could save all he could; and Jesus says that we Christians should certainly be as prudent in dealing with money as this pagan. By this the Bible doesn’t mean that we should sock away all of our money for a rainy day, for Jesus specifically refutes this with the story He tells about the man who keeps filling his barns and building new barns to fill, only to die with all of the barns full. Jesus calls this man a fool. Also, in *The Parable of the Talents* and *The Parable of the Pounds*, the only servant condemned to outer darkness is the one who socked away his money by burying it and saving it in that sense. That’s not what the Bible means when it tells us to save all that we can!

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Rather, the Bible means that a Christian disciple will save all that he can by not spending his money foolishly. Jesus is telling us that if we are to follow Him and be His disciples that we must be wise and prudent about the way we spend our money. Oh, how we Americans need this lesson today! I am continually amazed at how otherwise intelligent people can get themselves into such stupid financial predicaments. One husband protested to his wife, "But dear, if we buy a new car, how will we pay for it?" She replied, "There you go again, confusing the issue by bringing up two problems at the same time." This seems to be the disease of our day. Especially does it reach epidemic stage when we approach Christmas! Americans go on wild spending orgies — compulsively buying the latest gadget, toy, or fashion, not because we need it but because everyone else is doing it. Consequently, a great many Americans today are only one paycheck away from bankruptcy.

We're all a lot like the husband who said to his wife: "Well, if we'd just skip the payment on the stove and refrigerator this month, we could make a down payment on a new TV." This malady of the masses has become our way of life, when the Christian way should be "save all you can" by not spending your money foolishly. Christian, be prudent in the way you spend money!

The real problem for most of us is not that we don't make enough money; rather, it is the foolish way we spend what we have! We need to learn this second lesson about using our money: "Save all you can!" Not for just the purpose of saving itself, but for the purpose of fulfilling God's third and final law for a Christian in dealing with money.

III. "Give all you can!"

"Give all you can!" This is the difference between a genuine Christian disciple and the dishonest rascal in our parable. Jesus emphasizes that this rascal was prudent in making all that he could and prudent in saving all that he could, but he made it and saved it for the wrong reason! Then, in the punch line Jesus drives home the main point of this parable: A Christian disciple will make money and save it, so that he can exchange it for eternal treasures! How? By giving all that he can! That's how!

One of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible is the story we call *The Rich Young Ruler* (Lk 18:18-30). Remember, this rich young man came to Jesus seeking an answer to the question, "How can I have eternal life?" Jesus answers him by telling him to go and exchange his money for eternal treasures by following Him; and by giving all he can give to bring God's kingdom on earth. This rich young man refuses, and as he walks away Jesus remarks to His followers:

"How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God"
(Lk 18:24).

Consequently, many people think that this young man's problem was being rich and they go on to equate wealth with sin and poverty with godliness. God forbid! That's heresy! Money was not this young man's problem; it was his opportunity! His problem was that he did not recognize "The Exchange Rate That Really Matters"! George Frederick Watt, the great artist, recognized it when he immortalized this rich young ruler in his famous painting which shows only the back of a young man slowly walking away from Jesus. You see the disappointment in his drooped shoulders, the irresolution in the fingers of his hand, half open, half shut as though he wants to close them on his wealth but doesn't dare do it, or open them and let all of the wealth drop out, but doesn't dare do that either. This great artist captures the true import of Jesus' message.

What Jesus wants us to see is one of the most amazing transformations that can happen to a human being. In His parables, Jesus calls this amazing transformation by the name of "stewardship," which is simply His word for that divine alchemy that changes money into Christian disciples! This young man just rejected the greatest opportunity that comes in life: the opportunity to become a real man — a Christian disciple — by exchanging his money for true personhood — for new life. Jesus is saying to this young man and to every man,

"You either exchange your money for spiritual wealth, or your money will destroy you. Moths will eat it, rust will corrode it, thieves will steal it. Come, follow Me and put your money to work redeeming and enriching the impoverished; and nothing can ever take it away. In this way it will be given eternal significance!"

That's how to exchange earthly money for eternal treasures. The more we make and the more we save, the more opportunity we have to use "The Exchange Rate That Really Matters." God would not tell us to make and save all we can if wealth was inconsistent with His will. He wants us to have wealth so we can exchange it for eternal treasures! That's the way His kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

If these words mean anything, they mean that to a large extent the use of our money now determines our eternal life to come! It means that we can exchange our fiscal riches for spiritual wealth! How? By giving all that we can, that's how! That, and that alone, is Christian stewardship, which is that amazing divine alchemy that changes money into people of God. This is the miracle that God wants to perform in all of our lives, but we must do our part before He can do His.

What is our part? The Bible shows us in a contrasting story of a young lad who gave Jesus what He had, even though it was only two fish and five loaves. When he gave all he could, the lad witnessed a most amazing transformation as Jesus transformed his gift into enough food for five thousand people. This miracle originated not with Jesus, but with the

lad giving what he had to Jesus. This is the way every miracle must originate, for Jesus can bless only what we give Him. Will such amazing transformations take place in our lives and in the life of our church? That depends upon what we give our Lord to bless. Jesus can bless in our personal lives and in our church only what we place in His hands to bless. Like the rich young ruler, we can walk away from this blessed transformation, or like the lad with the fish and loaves we can participate in it. The choice is ours.

During World War II my outfit was the first American contingent to arrive in Scotland. Naturally, after debarking we were eager to see the country and to buy souvenirs to send home. I walked into the first little shop I saw and chose a number of gifts for my loved ones, then took money out of my billfold to pay the dour Scottish shopkeeper. He took the American money in his hands, looked at it a long time, perplexed. Then, he looked up at me and said, "That's not the kind of money we use here. You will have to exchange that for the right kind of money — our money."

Isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying to us? He is saying that sooner or later we shall all be going to a new country — a country of the Spirit. What a sad day it will be if we have not learned this 35th discipleship lesson so we can exchange our money for eternal treasures!

"For truly, truly I say to you, make friends for yourself through your money, so that when it fails, you will have spiritual riches in your Father's eternal home."

How? Our Lord's answer is plain:

"Make all you can!"

"Save all you can!"

"Give all you can!"

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #35?
2. How would you define “prudence”?

Search the Scriptures

3. Who or what is the source of all wealth? (Deut 8:18; Acts 17:25)
4. According to Philippians 3:20 our true citizenship is in heaven. Read Philippians 4:14-20 answering the following questions:

What benefit did the Philippians receive as a result of giving to Paul's ministry? (v.17)

How was their gift described? (v.18)

Did their gift leave them lacking? (v.19)

Who received the glory? (v.20)

Internalize God's Word

5. Ask yourself these questions: Am I making all I can? Am I saving all I can? Am I giving all I can? Read the following familiar passages about giving, and then let them form the foundation of your prayer as you ask God to show you where you are with Him in this matter. Either make a note of His word to you in each passage, or just summarize what God is saying to you.

Malachi 3:10

Luke 12:32-34

2 Corinthians 9:7-12

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Summary

Memory scripture: Luke 6:38

Notes

Sermon 36: The Agony and the Ecstasy

In our 36th discipleship lesson Jesus reveals to us “The Agony and the Ecstasy” of life. He does it by choosing the four most important and precious areas in all of our lives and then showing us how they can either cause us hell or bring us true riches. He does it in nine short verses, verses 10-18 of chapter 16 of Luke, which on first reading, appear to be unrelated. However, on further study, we see that Jesus is telling us we can make life “agony” by permitting these four things to be our Master and control us, or we can make life “ecstasy” by keeping them under control as we make them the servants of our Master. The four areas of life that Jesus deals with in our scripture are:

1. Money — verses 10-12
2. Work or vocation — verses 14-15
3. Religion — verses 16-17
4. Marriage or family life — verse 18.

Right in the middle, in verse 13, Jesus ties these four things together:

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Lk 16:13).

Although the word “mammon” is sometimes translated as “money” it has a much broader meaning than that. It literally means “riches” or all of the material and finite things in which we often put our trust. Jesus is warning us against putting our trust in any finite thing and making that thing ultimate within itself. If we do, He says these four things which are meant to be the true riches in life will become the agony of life for us! Our discipleship lesson could be stated this way:

Discipleship Lesson #36

A disciple must have only one master, and that master must be God as revealed by Jesus Christ.

Now, let’s see what this truth means in these four areas of our lives.

I. Money

“If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches?” (Lk 16:11)

Do you realize that Jesus says more about money and material things than about any subject, other than God? Why? Because money is so important in living life, that’s why! Jesus came to reveal to us the truth about living

Scripture

John 16:10-18

Text

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Luke 16:13

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life! In our scripture when Jesus speaks of unrighteous mammon He is not downgrading the importance of money; rather He is revealing to us how money or any other material thing can give us joy and bring us true riches. He is telling us that no material and finite thing on its own can ever be our true riches, for money is not meant to be an end in itself. It is meant to be a means to the right and righteous end. He is telling us that money must never be made into our god and worshipped, for that can bring us nothing but problems and agony.

This is the primary difference between a communist and a Christian. A communist is first and foremost a materialist. He believes, first of all, that only material things are true riches. Karl Marx called communism “dialectical materialism” — the argument that material things are the only things that really matter. He held that material things are ultimate themselves, that life finds its meaning in the possessing of material things. The communist is an atheist because money is his god. He worships mammon. This idea of “dialectical materialism” didn’t originate with Engels or Marx. It originated with Satan when Jesus confronted him in the wilderness. Dialectical materialism was the first thing with which Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Satan tempted Jesus to make material things ultimate by turning the stones into bread. Jesus answered Satan,

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4).

Jesus is saying exactly the same thing to us here, when He declares that material things have meaning in life only when a righteous and loving God exercises control over them. Most Americans today detest the thought of living under communism, but still the way many Americans live today is much closer to the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx than it is to the true riches of Jesus. That is, money is really ultimate in their scale of values, and thus money becomes their god and is worshipped by them!

Of course, money is important. It is one of the most important things in all of life, but its true value can never be realized until this unrighteous mammon is made righteous by the touch of Almighty God. Christ is telling us that when we stop letting our money master us and we begin to master our money by making Christ our Master, then our money becomes one of the greatest assets that God uses in building His kingdom on earth. Then our money becomes new churches, Christian education for children, training of young preachers, missions of all kinds around the world, and church programs of all descriptions. It becomes the means by which our Lord’s great commission is fulfilled on this earth. When we make money an end in itself, it becomes the very source of agony in our own lives and in our world. Jesus says our money can become the means to true riches for us, but only when we make it the servant of our righteous Master, for *“no servant can serve two masters ... you cannot serve God and mammon!”* (Luke 16:13)

II. Vocation

“But He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God’” (Lk 16:15).

The same is true, says Jesus, of our work or vocation. In verses 14 and 15 Jesus uses the work of the Pharisees to point up this truth. He tells them that they are using their work as an end in itself to justify and exalt themselves before men; therefore they are misusing one of the most important things in life and thus they are doomed to agony instead of ecstasy.

The Bible says that God created us in His image because He wants us to be co-workers with Him here on earth. In the opening pages of the Bible God says He gives us dominion over everything else on earth, so that through our work we can subdue it for Him. God didn't create a world in which work is essential just so we can eke out a living for 50 or 60 years and then die. He created work so we can make a life in partnership with Him and because of this partnership He can give us eternal life!

One of our greatest temptations is to use our work as an end in itself to justify and exalt ourselves as the Pharisees did. This was our Lord's second temptation in the wilderness, when the Devil tempted him to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple and win people through His fame instead of finishing His work of redemption through His death and resurrection. Jesus answered the Devil by saying, *“Again, it is written you shall not tempt the Lord your God.”* Jesus is telling us that our work can either be our greatest curse or our greatest blessing — either agony or ecstasy!

Last Friday, I sat and talked for a couple of hours with a man who was well past the age of retirement, but both his spirit and his actions were younger than most men in their 40's or 50's. I asked myself why. As we continued our conversation I understood. With all the hardship he had experienced, life should have gobbled him up long ago; instead, he was experiencing success and enjoying victory over the bad breaks. He had to quit school and start working every day at the age of 16. Many people would have cursed their luck and settled for welfare, but he saw it as an opportunity to be in partnership with God as His co-worker on earth. He has worked hard ever since and still works hard; but rather than his work being a way to glorify himself, he has made it into a way to glorify God and help Him subdue this wicked world in which we live. His work all across the years has been joyful and exciting for him, because he has permitted God to touch it. This can be true no matter what kind of work we do. Jesus says that our work can be either “agony or ecstasy” depending upon whether we make it an end within itself to exalt ourselves, or as a way a means to true riches as we go into partnership with our Master and become a co-worker with Him here on earth, for *“no servant can serve two masters ... you cannot serve God and mammon.”*

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III. Religion

“The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently” (Lk 16:16).

In verses 16 and 17 Jesus reminds us of man’s two approaches to religion — one approach which leads to agony and the other which leads to ecstasy. Again, the key is exactly the same: whether we make religion an end within itself or use it as a means to true riches — a life of oneness and union with God.

Jesus says in these two verses that before the days of John the Baptist all we had to guide us was God’s divine Law as revealed to Moses. When people transgressed the law, God would raise up prophets to call the people of God back to the law of God. Because of inbred sin no person could keep the law, so God in His grace sent us His Son Jesus to fulfill the law for us, making it possible for us to enter His kingdom.

Jesus goes on to say that any person who enters God’s Kingdom, even by grace, must still enter it violently! What does He mean by this? What does He mean, “we must enter it violently?” He means that we must enter it through a struggle with ourselves — a violent struggle with ourselves! Why? Simply, because of this temptation to glorify ourselves and put ourselves in the center of life even in our religion — maybe especially in our religion! We are always tempted through a religion of law to show how good and how perfect we are, instead of showing how great and loving and merciful our God is through a religion of grace. This is simply another illustration of our Lord’s temptation to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple — the temptation to put ourselves in the center to show how great we are and what we can do, instead of putting our gracious and righteous God in the center to proclaim what He has done, by grace, for us! All of us who are saved by grace are tempted to revert to a life of law in order to justify and exalt ourselves. When we do we doom ourselves to agony, for the Bible says that no man can keep the law, *“no, not one!”*

Many of us who really want to be Christians need to stop wasting our energy and time trying to be good through keeping the law. Instead, we need to use this energy to “enter the kingdom of God violently,” that is, we need to use it to come face-to-face with the temptation to exalt ourselves through a religion of law and defeat this temptation once and for all by claiming our Lord’s victory over it as our own. That’s grace! A life of grace is simply claiming that grace for ourselves each day as we invite our righteous Lord to be our righteousness. That’s the difference between the agony and the ecstasy in life! Jesus says that our religion can be either agony or ecstasy, depending upon whether we use it as a way to exalt ourselves or as a means to true riches as we become one with God through a life of grace, for *“no servant can serve two masters . . . you cannot serve God and mammon!”*

IV. Marriage or Family Life

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“Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery” (Lk 16:18).

Finally, Jesus deals with the most important subject of all: marriage — the closest relationship we can have upon this earth. The Bible tells us that God created the family as the basic unit of all creation. The family is where all human beings are meant to learn about all of the basics of life: about love, mercy, faith, hope, grace, responsibility, money, work and religion, and how to live in community. The parents, especially the fathers, are charged by God with the responsibility to pass on these truths to their children. Then, in just one sentence, the last sentence of our scripture — verse 18 — Jesus reveals why the world was in such a mess then and is still in such a mess today. It is because of the breakdown of the family! The family has broken down, says Jesus, because we’ve substituted man’s ways for God’s ways — we have substituted divorce for holy matrimony. We have substituted “agony for ecstasy!”

In a parallel passage on divorce, which is much more detailed, Mark 10:1-12, Jesus says that Moses’ law allowed divorce because of man’s hardness of heart. He explained that God intended for every marriage to be made in heaven — for every husband and wife to become one through the miraculous and holy touch of our almighty and righteous God. Why then is there so much divorce and turmoil and agony in our families today? Jesus answers this question in Luke 16:18. It is because we have given in to the third temptation which is common to man — the temptation to exercise arbitrary power over others. Remember, Jesus was taken to the top of a mountain by the Devil and promised arbitrary power over others, if He would just deny God and use this power as a selfish human being cut off from God. That is, the devil tempted Him to use His power without the divine and holy touch and guidance of Almighty God. Jesus answered him:

“Begone Satan! for it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve”” (Mt 4:10).

The point is that without God all power corrupts! No place is this truer than in the home, in marriage. At the time that Jesus spoke these words, any Jewish husband could arbitrarily write a certificate of divorce and put his wife out on the street! To give either husband or wife such arbitrary power is bound to corrupt, and we are seeing more and more of that same corruption in our American families today.

The biblical answer is not another religious law against divorce. God forbid! That’s simply another way of giving in to the temptation to revert to a religion of law instead of living a life of grace. The Church has tried that for nearly 2,000 years, only to see the family breakdown get worse and worse. That, again, is simply another way of making the wrong thing

master — man's laws instead of God's grace. We are not under law, but we are under grace!

Our Lord's answer for divorce and family breakdown is the same answer He has already given us for these three other important and precious areas of our lives: money, work and religion. That answer is making God master — making God master in our marriages and in our homes!

In the area of religion "we enter the kingdom violently" as we struggle against the temptation to substitute a religion of law for a life of grace. But that struggle is child's play compared to the struggle we must go through to subjugate our pride and our desire for power in order to make our Lord the Master of our marriage and home! If we insist upon being the power and the master in our home, our Lord says the result must inevitably be agony, dissension, turmoil, and breakdown, for *"no servant can serve two masters ... you cannot serve God and mammon."*

Our Lord sets before us our alternatives in the four most precious areas of our lives, and He leaves it to us which alternative we shall choose. He makes it abundantly clear in this discipleship lesson that to be His disciples and experience the exciting, abundant life He has for us, we must have only one master in all four of these areas of life. This is a truth you can depend upon:

Discipleship Lesson #36

A disciple must have only one master, and that master must be God as revealed by Jesus Christ.

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #36?
2. List the four areas of life dealt with in this sermon.

Search the Scriptures

3. According to 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 what does the Bible say concerning our responsibilities in each of the four areas dealt with in this discipleship lesson?

v.6 | v.7 | v.8 | v.9 | v.10 | v.11 | v.12

Internalize God's Word

4. Using Steps in Praying God's Word found in the Appendix, pray each of the following scriptures, listening for answers to the related questions. Let God respond to you as He chooses: through mental pictures, reminders of previous answers He has given you, memories of past experiences, scripture, an inner knowing or impression, audible words, or the sense that you are to wait and watch for revelation and guidance through the circumstances and relationships of your life. Commit yourself to obey the guidance He gives.

Exodus 20:1-4 Who or what is actually my god — money, work, religion, family, or the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Matthew 6:10 What does this petition mean?

Do I honestly want it to be granted?

Matthew 6:33 What have I been seeking first?

If I want to seek the kingdom first, how do I go about doing that?

Memory scripture: Romans 11:33 and 36

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Sermon 37: A Charge To Keep We Have

In our *Journey into Discipleship* we come to the parable of *The Rich Man and Lazarus* found in Luke 16:19-31. Sometimes this parable is called the parable of *Lazarus and Dives*, although Lazarus is the only one in the parable to whom Jesus actually gives a name. In fact, Lazarus is the only person in all of Jesus' parables who is given a name, and we shall see why a little later. The rich man gets the name Dives from the Vulgate — the Latin translation of the Bible by Jerome in 382 A. D. Since the Latin adjective meaning "rich" is "dives," that is what Jerome called this man who was so blessed. Dives got his name from Jerome, not from Jesus.

The usual interpretation of this parable is plain and to the point. It says that because Dives refuses to share his material blessings with Lazarus he ends up in hell, and if we don't share our material possessions with the poor beggars of this world this is what will happen to us! Now, I'm confident that Jesus does want us to be aware of the needs of others around us, and to think seriously and compassionately about the way we use our material possessions, but this is not the real point in this parable. This parable does not deal primarily with the bread of this world — our material possessions; it deals primarily with the heavenly Bread of Life — our spiritual possessions. Let me point out three facts that are emphasized by Jesus.

I. What Dives Has

First, Jesus emphasizes the two things Dives has that Lazarus does not have. The first is obvious, for Jesus tells us in the first line of the parable: Dives has material wealth. He is rich in the things of this world. He has money, clothes, house, food; he has everything that money can buy.

It's amazing how many of us have consistently missed the other thing which Dives has, for Jesus is emphatic about this too, although it is tucked away toward the end of the parable. We are told that while Dives writhes tormented in hell, he pleads for the opportunity to go back to earth and warn his loved ones about their pending doom. The heavenly voice booms across this great chasm: "They already have all they need! They have what you had. They have Moses and the prophets. They have holy scripture. They have the Word of God!"

Do you see what Jesus is telling us? He is telling us that God has not only provided us with all of the material things we need on this abundant earth; He has also given us all the spiritual food we need in His Holy Word. Dives not only had material wealth, but as a Jew, a chosen child of God, he also has spiritual wealth. He not only possesses those things with which to

Scripture

Luke 16:19-31

Text

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever ..."

John 6:35 & 51

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make a living; he also possess those riches with which to make a life. The point is this: Dives not only has earthly bread; he also has heavenly bread. Dives is a very, very rich man. He has both the riches of this world in his material possessions and the riches of heaven in the Word of God.

Unfortunately these are the two things which poor old Lazarus does not have. Oh, they are all around him, but he needs help to get them. He needs help to get on his own feet both physically and spiritually, for the Bible says that Lazarus is a beggar. The King James Version of the Bible calls him “a certain beggar,” while another version describes him as “a certain utterly destitute man.” Both materially and spiritually he is destitute. He needs to be fed for he is starving to death. He is starving and needs both “bread for life” and “Bread of Life.”

That, says Jesus, is the picture of mankind. It’s the picture of a beggar who needs God’s help for his life both now and eternally. What Dives has that Lazarus does not have is food for his body and food for his spirit, both earthly bread and heavenly bread.

II. What Lazarus Has

In this parable Jesus also emphasizes what Lazarus has that Dives does not have. Jesus tells us this when he gives Lazarus his name. Everyone who originally heard this parable would know immediately what Jesus meant by this. In that part of the world people have always considered a name the most important possession a person can own, for a name reflects the very essence of the character of the person named.

For example, the Bible says that God changed the name of the great Jewish patriarch who is named Jacob at birth because he is born “holding his brother’s heel.” When the rebellious Jacob yields his life to God’s rule, his name is changed to Israel, which means “God rules.” Before Jesus is born, an angel announces that he shall be called “Emmanuel” because it means “God with us.” When Simon bar Jona (that is, Simon the son of Jona) confesses that Jesus is the divine Son of God, Jesus re-names him Peter, which means “The Rock” — the rock of faith in Jesus as the Son of God, upon which faith our Lord’s Church is built. After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus his name is changed to the Roman name Paul because he is called to be “The Apostle to the Gentiles.”

From the beginning of time a name has been a person’s most precious possession, for in his name can be found the central character of the person himself. If his original name did not reflect this primary characteristic, he was given a new name. Jesus names this destitute beggar in our parable to reflect the very essence of his character. Although he is utterly destitute and desperately needs both food for his body and food for his spirit, he does have one thing; he has a name. He has a name, because Jesus gives him a name. The name Jesus gives him is Lazarus, which means “God will

be my help.”

Although this beggar is unable to help himself, and Dives will not give him the help he needs, Jesus gives him the name of Lazarus, because He knows God will be his help. Lazarus has no material possessions in which to put his trust. He doesn't even have God's Word in which to put his trust, for those chosen and called to share it with him have failed to do so. He does have one thing: he has a name — Lazarus. He can trust in God for his help.

Dives has no such name. Although as one of the chosen race he covenanted to put his trust in God, Dives puts his trust solely in himself and his material possessions. Even in hell, Dives has to be reminded that as a Jew he had the Word of God all along, but paid no attention to it. He didn't need it, he thought, for he trusted in himself. Although today we sometimes call this rich man Dives because of Jerome, he really doesn't have a name in our parable. Jesus emphasized the fact that the poor beggar had the name Lazarus, but the rich man is known only as “the rich man.” Why? Because in the eyes of God all of us are known by that in which we put our trust. The Bible is clear that we can be named among the children of God only when we put our trust in God. Jesus is telling us that such trust is the key to the kingdom of Heaven. Lazarus was open to God's help; Dives was not. That's what Lazarus had that Dives did not have.

III. The Judgment of Dives and of Lazarus

Dives

Jesus also shows us in this parable why each man is judged as he is — Dives doomed to hell and Lazarus blessed with heaven. Why is Dives doomed to hell? Dives is doomed to hell because he never recognizes the value of heavenly bread. He is so absorbed with his earthly bread that he doesn't even know there is such a thing as heavenly bread. Dives is doomed because he put his trust in his earthly bread and substituted it for heavenly bread in his scales of values.

I'm sure that Dives thought he was being quite generous in giving poor old Lazarus the scraps from his table, but actually he was sealing his own doom. Don't misunderstand me here, for there is definitely a call upon every Christian to share his earthly bread with his fellow man. But we are to share it in addition to, not as a substitute for, heavenly bread.

I submit that many of us are making this fatal error. Like Dives, we try to fulfill our responsibility to our fellow men by giving them the earthly scraps from our sumptuous tables, instead of giving them the heavenly bread they so desperately need. We actually think that being a Christian simply means that we share our earthly possessions with others. We actually think that if we do, we have done all that God charges us to do. Why shouldn't we think that? It has been the predominant theology of the Church for several decades now. It's the heart of so-called “liberation

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theology” which is being passed off as the gospel around the world today.

The Bible says we are created in the image of Almighty God to spend eternity with Him. Jesus was sent down from heaven to feed our starved spirits so we can have eternal life. Hear His words:

“I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever” . . (John 6:35, 51).

Jesus warns us against this temptation so that we will not fall into the trap which caught Dives. Listen to Him again:

““Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”” (Mt 4:4).

The point is this: Dives ends up in hell, not because he refuses to share his earthly bread with Lazarus. He ends up in hell because that is all he does give to Lazarus. Dives gives Lazarus only earthly scraps. Dives thought that being his brother’s keeper was enough, while God expects us to be our brother’s brother and share our heavenly bread with him. Poor Dives! He lived, died, and went to hell without ever realizing that he needed heavenly bread for eternal life. Even in hell his focus was still wrong:

““Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame”” (Lk 16:24).

Oh, dear friend, the destitute beggars at our doorsteps actually think they need only earthly scraps. They are murdering for it, robbing for it, cheating for it, because they actually think that earthly bread is the answer to their miserable condition. Yet we who have eaten of the heavenly bread should know better. Of all people we should know that only the bread which comes down from heaven can put an end to this rotten evil and give us eternal life.

Why has the Church of Jesus Christ fallen into the same trap that caught Dives and sent him to hell — substituting earthly scraps for heavenly bread? Our Lord’s warns us that any time we scorn the Word of God this will happen. We have fallen into Dives’ trap because like him we have not eaten the Word of God. We have intellectualized it. We have de-mythologized it. We have explained it away. Until now, like Dives, many of us just ignore it. Once this course is set, there is no stopping place short of hell itself, says Jesus in our parable as He gives us the 37th discipleship lesson:

Discipleship Lesson #37

Jesus charges us, as disciples, to feed the Bread of Life to a hungry world.

That’s our calling: to feed heavenly bread to a hungry world. That’s what

Dives did not do. Any time we as Christians — or as an organized Church — try to substitute earthly bread for heavenly bread, then like Dives, all we can ever give the poor beggars of this world are table scraps. If we are to follow Jesus, we must get our priorities right and begin to put the emphasis on heavenly bread. Then the earthly bread will become more than just our table scraps — it will become the very means for supplying heavenly bread to a hungry world.

Isn't this what happened when Jesus fed the five thousand? Turn to the 6th chapter of John and you will see that this was no tossing of meager table scraps to ease aching belly-pains. Rather, it was an acted-out parable to feed man's starving spirit with heavenly bread. The earthly bread and the heavenly bread actually become one in the hands of Jesus. Even as He feeds them earthly bread, it becomes the means for feeding them heavenly bread, as He says:

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:35, 51).

The five thousand were not only filled with this wholesome earthly bread; they were filled with wholesome heavenly bread too. As disciples of Jesus, this is also our calling: To give the starving of this world more than just table scraps. This is why a missions program that does not feed people the Word of God is really not Christian missions; it is a social welfare program. We are called to be the dispensers of the Word of God to a starving world. That's our discipleship lesson.

Lazarus

Enough of Dives and his hell! Let's look at the good news. Why did Lazarus end up in heaven? Certainly he didn't do anything himself to earn it, did he? He didn't get there because of what Dives did for him either, did he? He got there in spite of Dives, who ignored his real need, for God is not going to let the disobedience of a Dives thwart His grace and the saving work He has done for us in Christ. God is not going to let any man's disobedience do that. It may send us to hell as it did Dives, but it is not going to thwart God and His love for His people. There can be only one reason why Lazarus got to heaven, for it is the only good thing we are told about him in the whole parable. He got there because Jesus Christ gave him the key to heaven when He gave him a name. By giving him a name, Jesus made this poor beggar a somebody!

Here's the good news: Jesus came to give all of us the key to heaven for He came to give all of us a new name — a name which will be the very essence of our character. Jesus wants to give all of us a name today — the only name in all heaven and earth that will assure us of eternal life. We can be as destitute as this beggar Lazarus, but with this new name we will inherit

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all of the riches of heaven. Or, we can be as rich as Dives with this world's goods, but without this heavenly name we will be completely disinherited and shut off from God.

The good news is that Jesus came to earth to give each one of us a new name; Jesus came down from heaven to give us His own name! He died to give it to us. He rose to give it to us. He came to give all of us the name Christian — His own name, to show that we are His heirs. Jesus Christ (who was named Emmanuel — God with us) wants to show us the power of His name by offering us the name “Christian,” which means that we belong to Him now and eternally. Christ wants us to see that when we do accept His name as our name, He bequeaths to us the same inheritance He gives to the hero in our parable. When through trust in Christ we actually know that “God is my help” as Lazarus knew it, Christ places in our hand the key to heaven and eternal life. Christ is offering this key to all who will accept it through trust in Him. Then we can offer this starving world the Bread of Life which came down from heaven, and like Lazarus spend eternity with Him.

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #37?
2. From this discipleship lesson name the two things Dives has that Lazarus does not have.
3. What does Lazarus have that Dives does not have?

Search the Scriptures

4. What specific instructions are given in the following Scriptures regarding our responsibility to feed heavenly bread to a hungry world?

Mt 28:19-20

2 Tim 4:2

1 Pet 3:15

Josh 1:8-9

Internalize God's Word

5. What is the meaning of the name Lazarus?

Would that name suit you?

What is the meaning of the name Peter? _____ Paul? _____

Jacob? _____ Israel? _____

At a time of crisis in his life, as he was fearfully anticipating a reunion with the brother he had wronged, Jacob spent an entire night wrestling with God. Read this mysterious, dramatic story of the changing of Jacob's name in Genesis 32:24-30.

The name your human parents gave you when you were born may have reflected what they saw in you or it may have revealed their dreams for you. Your Heavenly Father has a special name for you too. Sometimes friends who know us well reveal our real name to us as was the case with Barnabas, or bar Nabas which means son of encouragement — one who could be depended on to encourage others. What do you think is your true "Christian name"? If you need help discovering your true "Christian name," ask your friends to help you.

What are some names that might fit?

Talk with your Heavenly Father about your name. Tell Him some of the unlovely names you sometimes call yourself, or names you think others call you. Ask Him to reveal His name for you — to show you how He sees you.

Memory scripture: 1 John 3:1a

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Sermon 38: The Responsibility of a Disciple

A problem which has plagued Christian disciples since the beginning is the problem of how to live together in community, how to be the Church as it is meant to be. Jesus deals with this problem in the 38th discipleship lesson found in the first 4 verses of chapter 17 of Luke. Since Matthew expands this answer into an entire chapter in his Gospel, let's turn to that parallel passage — chapter 18 of Matthew — for our guidance. The term “little ones,” which Jesus uses once in our text in Luke, is used several times in Matthew 18, and does not actually refer to little children, but rather to “babes in the faith” — new Christians, new Church members. The keynote of this chapter and of Discipleship Lesson #38 is the terrible weight of responsibility for each other, especially for new Christians, that Jesus places upon His disciples. He says:

“... whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt 18:6).

The point Jesus wants us to see is this: We are not only responsible for our own eternal souls; we are also responsible for the souls of others in our community — in the Church. That's what it means to live in community. Jesus came to create a community of God's people on earth, not a conglomeration of individual prima donnas. Jesus is telling us here that our eternal destiny depends upon our learning to live together in community. He is saying, “When we become Christian, we not only make a commitment to Him personally as our Lord; we also make a commitment to His Church as His Body on earth, and a commitment to other people who are part of that Church.” Jesus says that becoming a Christian is a threefold commitment:

1. It is a commitment to Jesus Christ as our Lord.
2. It is a commitment to the Church as the Body of Christ on earth.
3. It is a commitment to one another, so each of us can become what he or she is meant to be.

Let's see what these three commitments mean.

I. A commitment to Jesus Christ as our Lord.

From a practical standpoint this means a commitment to worship Him, that is, to recognize His worth as our God, and to put Him in the center of all life. As disciples we have a responsibility to worship our Lord regularly with other members of our Church, because that's the only way a genuine Christian community can be built.

Scripture

Luke 17:1-4

Text

And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.”

Luke 17:1-2

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Moses recognized this truth when God revealed to him the 4th Commandment: “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” In this law God reveals to His people that there is a definite rhythm in God’s universe, and that we must receive regularly each week in worship before we can live and work together as a community. The trouble is, the Jews made this basic law into a maze of intricate legalisms that became a tremendous burden to bear. Although they went through all of the prescribed ritual on the Sabbath they were no longer worshipping in the true sense of the word; rather they were doing their duty.

Then Jesus came into the world and said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Jesus delivered man from the bondage of legalism about the Sabbath, and put the emphasis back where God had put it originally: getting into the rhythm of regular worship — at least every seventh day drawing aside, giving ourselves to God and receiving from Him, so we can be His instruments out in our world the other six days. We saw in Discipleship Lesson #6 that this rhythm is: Receive from God — Give to others! Receive — Give!

It is in this common experience of worship that God transforms us from worldly individuals into a genuine spiritual community, for it is in this common experience of worship that we actually become one in the Spirit. It’s not because we all worship the same way, but because we worship the same Lord in our own individual ways and permit others to do the same thing!

This freedom in worship is crucial, because no one can truly worship with a critical spirit. If your mind is focused on what’s wrong with the music, or the preacher, or the way someone else worships it will be impossible for you to receive from God. Many of us are in bondage to a particular form of worship. We actually worship form rather than our Lord. We think that ours is the right way to worship and everyone should worship our way. When that happens we’re not really worshipping. We think we are, but our eyes and our thoughts are on ourselves instead of on our Lord; and, of course, we can worship only when He is central. If our eyes are on Jesus and our thoughts on what God has done for us in Christ, we can worship Him whether the music is a majestic hymn or a foot-stomping, hand-clapping chorus. The form is not the important thing. The important thing is oneness in the Spirit. Only through oneness in Spirit can a church become a genuine worshipping community.

One of the quickest ways to cause a new Christian to stumble is to be critical of the way he worships. Jesus says, “It is better to have a millstone around our neck and cast in the sea than [through our critical spirit] to cause one of these ‘little ones’ to stumble.”

II. A commitment to our Church

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Our second commitment as a Christian is a commitment to our Church as the Body of Christ. This is a commitment to stewardship. It is a commitment to give a fair share of our time, talents and money to our Church. It is a commitment to service — to give ourselves alongside the other members to our Church.

As Christians, we must serve God together in order to be a genuine community. The uniqueness of humanity is two-fold: We are unique in our likeness and unique in our differences. We are unique in that all of us have the image of God within us. We are all alike in this respect. We are also unique in our differences, in that no two of us are exactly alike. We are all different in looks, in intelligence, in talents. It is our unique likeness — the image of God within us — that enables us to be molded into a genuine community through worship. It is in our unique differences that we become a genuine Christian community through serving our Lord! As we pool our time, our talents and our money in serving God we truly become one body — a true community of God's people working together.

We often remember the silly little things that happened while our children were growing up — things that have no special significance, but that somehow stick in our minds rather than the important things. I remember when my oldest son was just a little tike. It would be 25 years ago now. He asked me to draw him a picture of a mule. Now, if any man should have been able to draw a picture of a mule I am that man. You see I know mules. I've ridden 'em. I've plowed 'em. I was raised with 'em. To tell you the truth I've even preached to a few and had some on my Administrative Board!

Do you know when I had drawn the best picture of a mule I could possibly draw, my son was so disappointed and his face was so long I thought he was going to cry. The only way I could keep my self respect was to blurt out: "Well, John, we're not all supposed to be able to draw!" No, we all can't do everything that everyone else can do; because we're all different! Dear friends, all of us can use this unique difference to serve our Lord in our own special way in His Church. You see, it is because of our unique difference that God can get all of His work done in the Church. Our unique difference is the root cause of one of our most dangerous temptations in the Church too: The temptation to be critical of those who do things differently.

For instance: a Christian has an exciting new experience with the Lord, and responds by offering himself in service to his church, only to be rebuffed by the critical eye and tongue of old timers who "just don't do it that way." I wonder how many "little ones" we have caused to stumble because of our criticism about the way they serve the church. Jesus says we cannot be His disciples without accepting our responsibility to encourage and nurture these little ones in their service to His Church. He warns us that it would

be better for us if a millstone were hung round our neck and we were cast into the sea, than that we should cause one of these little ones to stumble.

When my time comes to an end here as pastor of this great church and I must relinquish my post to another, it is not as a great preacher, or a good teacher, or a competent administrator, or even as a caring pastor that I hope to be remembered by you. Rather, I hope you remember me exactly like I want to remember each of you when your time comes: as a healthy, functioning member of the most important body on earth — the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, the community of God’s people! I hope you remember me as one who was able to work and serve in harness with others, without “kicking against the goads.” For God did not create us to be prima donnas, and stand out as one separated from the rest of God’s people; He created us to be a community of God’s people working together as one healthy Body. Let’s covenant together today to pool our time, talents and money in serving the Church because we have made a commitment to the Church as the Body of Jesus Christ on earth.

III. A commitment to one another

Our third and final commitment as Christians is a commitment to one another so each of us can fulfill our potential and become what he is meant to be. It is a commitment to love one another. In the Apostle John’s farewell to the early Christian churches in his three letters, one phrase stands out above all others: “Little children, love one another!” Why did he say this over and over? Because love of the brethren is what creates a genuine Christian community. Loving each other is what makes a church the Body of Christ on earth. You cannot have genuine community without it. If we truly love one another there will be no dissension about the way we worship or the way we serve. This is at the heart of our 38th discipleship lesson as Jesus points up our responsibility to love one another.

Discipleship Lesson #38

Our responsibility as disciples is to love one another genuinely in the church.

Almost every time I talk with someone who is disgruntled and down on the church, I discover that the root cause was an unloving word or an unloving act by another member.

As the son of a small town merchant in southern Oklahoma, one of my first jobs as a child was manning the soda pop box. You remember those boxes; they stood about waist high on four legs, with lids at both ends. Every Saturday I would fill the box with soda pop, ice it down, and then roll it out on the sidewalk in front of the store and sell pop to passers-by. It was the favorite gathering place for the other kids in town, because we had a special game we played with red soda pop. I don’t know whether the

present generation is aware of the peculiar qualities of red soda pop or not; but let me tell you it will fizz longer and spew farther than any other soda pop made. The game we played was to take a bottle of red soda pop, uncap it, put our thumb over the opening and shake it vigorously waist high; then take our thumb off and try to get it to our mouth before it spewed and fizzed all over our face. I can still remember my face dripping red soda pop and the other kids laughing and shouting, “You better hurry, man, or you’re gonna lose it all!” I guess I did it hundreds of times, but I can still remember the disappointment after it was over. I always felt let down, for when the spewing and fizzing stopped all I had really gotten was a lot of gas and a livid red face — nothing of substance at all! I wonder if our Lord doesn’t often feel disappointed and let down about the Church as He witnesses so much spewing and fizzing and so little loving!

When I first started preaching, I used to say over and over: “Now, Christian, you ought to be more loving. You ought to love one another!” The congregation would always nod in agreement, because they knew they ought to love one another, but that didn’t help them do it. It just made them feel worse. Thank God, I don’t do that anymore! The reason we don’t love is not that we don’t know we ought to; it is that we have not permitted God to finish the work He started in us when we accepted Jesus as our Savior. God is not through with us when we accept Christ and join the church; He is just beginning with us then. Then, we are ready to become “temples for His Holy Spirit” so He can live in us and love through us.

John Wesley summed it up on his death bed in just four words when he said: “The best of all is: God is with us!” It’s as simple as that: God is with us! When, through faith we permit God to be with us, we have the love within us to love even the unlovely, for God is love. Only when we permit God to be with us can we love in that way. The reason there is often so much spewing and fizzing instead of loving in the church is that we make love into an “ought” instead of a way of life — a way of seeing others through the eyes of the Living Christ, thinking of them with His mind, and feeling for them with His heart. We try to make love a human duty, and there is no power in love as duty! Our responsibility as Christian disciples is to love others with the love of Christ, to love others into becoming what they are meant to be! Then the Church will truly be the Church!

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #38?
2. What is the 3-fold commitment mentioned in this discipleship lesson?

Search the Scriptures

3. One of the greatest responsibilities Christ has given His disciples is the responsibility to love one another (John 13:34-35). What are some specific ways in which this love is demonstrated?

Rom 12:9-10

Rom 13:10

Gal 5:13-15

James 2:8-9

Internalize God's Word

4. Read each of the following passages from 1 Peter as a personal message to you about your relationships with others in your fellowship, especially with those who are not especially lovable. Write down what you hear the Father saying to you.

1:22

2:17

3:8-9

4:8-11

5:1-5, 14

5. Read 1 John 4:7-21. Use this scripture as a basis for praying God's Word, using the Steps as found in the Appendix.

Memory scripture: John 13:34-35

Sermon 39: How To Increase Your Faith

The 39th discipleship lesson in our *Journey Into Discipleship* concerns one of the most important yet misunderstood subjects in Christianity — the subject of faith. The disciples say to Jesus, “Lord, increase our faith!” In response to this Jesus says:

“If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, ‘Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you” (Lk 17:6).

Here, Jesus not only tells His disciples how to increase their faith; He also tells all of us what faith is and what we must do to have it, to keep it, and to help it grow and produce fruit. To help us understand what Jesus is saying here, I want also to place before you something else Jesus says about mustard seed in one of His shortest parables, found in Matthew 13:31-32:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

In our text Jesus is telling us three requirements for genuine Christian faith, and *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* helps us understand them. He says our faith must consist of:

1. The right object;
2. The right substance; and,
3. The right timing

I. The right object for our faith

First, we must have the right object for our faith. This is where the “faith formula” teachers have missed the point altogether. Faith, to be Christian faith, must have the right object, and that object cannot be ourselves, our own health, our prosperity, our dreams. Jesus makes it clear that Christian faith can have only one object and He shows us what this object is by holding before us a tiny mustard seed and saying, “You must have faith as a grain of mustard seed.” Notice: Not “*as much* faith as a grain of mustard seed,” but simply “faith as a grain of mustard seed.” What is the unique thing about this tiny grain of mustard seed? What is Jesus emphasizing? What special quality inherent in this tiny grain of mustard seed does He want us to see? It can be only one thing and that is its inherent “life.” Even though the mustard seed is the tiniest of seeds it still has within it the quality which can enable it to grow into a giant tree and that one object is

Scripture

Matthew 13:31-33
and Luke 17:5-6

Text

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” And the Lord said, “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, ‘Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

Luke 17:5-6

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life. When Jesus says, “You must have faith as a grain of mustard seed,” He means that we must have a faith with life in it. We must have a living faith! That’s what makes the mustard seed grow. That’s the only thing which can cause our faith to grow and produce too: Life! Living faith! According to the Bible there is only one object that can give life to our faith and that object is Jesus Christ our living Lord.

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

That’s why Jesus came to earth. That’s why God’s Son left His place of glory to come and live among us. He came so we can have a living object for our faith — so He can give life to our faith! Before Jesus, men and women put their faith in wealth, health, law, man-made institutions and holy men. Jesus came to deliver us from such dead faith and give us a living faith with Him as the object of our faith. “For in Him was life, and that life was the light of men.” Yet, many Christians have never shifted the object of their faith from dead, lifeless material things to our living Lord. “Faith formula” teaching — “If you just believe strongly enough you are going to get well, or your loved one is going to get well, or God is going to pay your bills, or help you win the jackpot or grand prize so you can get back on your feet financially, or God is going to see that you get to build your dream house” — is not only just not true; it is also the worst kind of heresy and desecrates one of the greatest words in the Bible, the word “faith.” True Christian faith always brings us to Jesus and to new life, but such false teaching as this blinds us to Jesus and the new life He offers us. The Bible says:

“He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life” (I John 5:12).

Only Jesus Christ the Son of God can give life to our faith; and He can do it only when He and He alone is the object of our faith. According to the Bible, Christian faith is not believing that God is going to do any specific thing according to our dictates and direction; Christian faith is believing that God has already done the most specific and blessed thing that can ever be done for us in Jesus Christ!

You can stand and look at a sycamore (sycamine) tree forever and believe with all of your being that it is going to be rooted up and planted in the sea and absolutely nothing is going to happen to that tree. Why? Because that is not Christian faith; that is wishful thinking, pipe-dreaming! The object of Christian faith cannot be a sycamore tree. It can be neither our own body nor someone else’s body, nor money, nor home, nor business, nor any other material thing. Christian faith must have only one object — Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the only way you can have faith with life in it — a living faith, faith as a grain of mustard seed, faith that is alive, ready to spring forth and reach its potential.

II. The right substance of our faith

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Jesus not only shows us the right object of our faith; He also shows us what must be the right substance of our faith. If our faith is going to increase and produce then we must make sure it is made up of the right substance. What is substance? The dictionary gives these three definitions:

“Substance is the material out of which anything is made.”

“Substance is the essential part of something.”

“Substance is the vital part of that which we are considering.”

Now, that is exactly what the Bible means in the only definition it ever gives of faith:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for ...” (Heb 11:1a, KJV).

That is, faith is the material out of which hope is made, and it is the essential or vital part out of which hope springs. Faith, not hope, is the bedrock. Faith is the ground, upon which we stand, that which makes everything else possible in the Christian life. Faith is the substance — that is, the material, the vital and essential part, out of which everything else is made. Now, let’s go back to our text and let Jesus tell us what that substance is.

“If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed ...” Jesus says. The first thing we saw about a grain of mustard seed is that inherent in it is life. What is the next thing about a grain of mustard seed? The next thing is how the inherent life in that seed is brought into being. Before that life can come into being, the seed must die. The substance of that real life is the death of the seed. The death of the seed is essential in order to bring forth life. Jesus says this must also be the substance of real Christian faith: We must die to self, so Christ can live in us. This, says Jesus, must be the substance of Christian faith.

The disciples ask, “Lord, increase our faith!” Jesus answers, “To increase your faith you must go beyond believing to being.” Until a mustard seed is placed in the soil and dies it cannot come to life and produce fruit, and until we go beyond “mind-belief” to being “Christ-possessed” neither can we.

- Faith is not simply believing in the Crucifixion; even the devil does that. *Faith is being crucified with Christ*, putting the old man to death within us so God’s Living Word can take root and grow in us.
- Faith is not simply believing in the Resurrection. *Faith is being raised with Christ* into the new person He wants us to be.
- Faith is not simply believing in Pentecost. *Faith is being filled with the Holy Spirit* of our Living Lord.
- Faith is not simply believing in miracles. Faith is offering ourselves to Christ to be the instrument for His miracles. *Faith is living and moving and having our being in Him.*

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- Faith is not simply believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, who was God when all things were made and created. *Faith is becoming a new creation in Him.*

This is what Jesus means in the illustration of the sycamine (sycamore) tree. Anyone who knows anything about a sycamore tree and about salt water in the sea knows that there is no way that a sycamore tree can be planted in the sea and live and grow. Why? Because that is the way our Lord created the sycamore tree and the sea. They are incompatible — inherently incompatible; and everything must operate according to our Lord's created order. That is, everything but one — the Creator Himself! He controls creation. He is above His own creation. He rules it; it doesn't rule Him. If He wants to say to that sycamine tree "Be rooted up and be planted in the sea," then that's exactly what will happen! It will grow there, too! For He is the Creator. He is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. He is the Giver of life in the first place and He is the Giver of new life.

The point is that it doesn't happen simply because the "old" sycamore tree is told to live in a foreign habitat. No, it happens because that tree has become a new creation through the power of the Creator and now its native habitat is the sea. The Creator creates a new tree capable of miraculous things. *"The old has passed away, behold, the new has come!"* (2 Cor. 5:17b)

Christian, Jesus says that this is exactly what He wants to do for you! He's not going to help you be a magician and let you cheapen His amazing grace with your shallow "mind-belief" or magic words so you can just "name it and claim it." God forbid! He's not going to abdicate and make you, the creature, into the almighty Creator. To make faith into such a fantasy is not only ridiculous; it is the worst kind of heresy. It keeps you from ever having the real thing made of the right substance! The substance of faith is dying to self, so Christ can do His work in us. The substance of faith is dying to self, so He can make us into a new creation capable of miraculous things. The substance of faith is dying to self, so we can become a new creation through the power of the Creator and our native habitat His will being done through us. Christian faith is never "naming it and claiming it." It is exactly the opposite. Christian faith is yielding ourselves so Jesus can do both the claiming and the naming. It is yielding ourselves so completely to Him as the object of our faith that He claims us as His very own, and then He names us as His "Body" here on earth through which He works His miraculous power as He wills!

III. The right timing

This leaves only this final word to be said, and that word concerns timing — the right timing of our faith and the fruit of our faith. When Jesus says, *"You must have faith as a grain of mustard seed,"* He means that true Christian faith always leaves the timing to God. The right timing of the fruit

of our faith is God's time, not ours. The tiny mustard seed doesn't grow into an 18-foot tree overnight. Many mustard plants do grow into 16 and 18 foot trees in God's timing!

All of us who have both children and the hobby of gardening can remember a time when our children helped us plant the seeds in our garden one day, and then early the next morning rushed out and began digging up the seeds to see how much they grew during the night. Those who say that faith is "naming it and claiming it" are practicing the same kind of childish ways. Instead of leaving the timing to God, they want to usurp God's all-knowing omnipotence and set their own time frame for God's miracles. This was the problem with the disciples when they said, "Lord, increase our faith." They wanted mature faith and immediate action without first going through the discipline which God requires.

Remember, when Jesus comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration, the nine disciples who were left behind are beside themselves, because they had failed in their attempts to heal an epileptic boy. After Jesus heals him, they ask Jesus why they failed, and Jesus replies,

"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (Mark 9:29).

The disciples must go and discipline themselves in these important means of grace if they are to increase their faith and produce such fruit. Our part is discipline in the means of grace not "naming it and claiming it."

When Jesus was passing through Samaria with His disciples and the unfriendly Samaritans snubbed them, James and John, the sons of thunder, wanted immediately to perform a miracle and bring fire down on them. Jesus rebuked them. Why? Because they wanted the immediate power of Jesus without internalizing His Word. They wanted to "name it and claim it." The Bible says:

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
(Rom 10:17, KJV).

In other words, Jesus is telling us to discipline ourselves in God's Word, leave the timing to Him, and our faith will increase and produce fruit. Remember how sure Peter was of his faith on the night before the Cross, wanting to rush right out and defend Jesus. When Peter had to face the Crucifixion, he wilted. Jesus had to start all over again with Peter, because Peter had failed to learn the basic lesson of faith: There can never be a Resurrection and a victory without a Crucifixion! Until you are disciplined to a life of selfless love you cannot increase your faith and produce fruit. The fallacy of the "faith formula" teachers today is that they are teaching "a Resurrection without a Cross" and that is impossible!

Remember how the disciples wanted to go out and bring in the kingdom of God immediately after the Ascension, but Jesus told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the power of the Holy Spirit, because no one can

have the faith they need to preach and to change lives without that power. This is what Peter Boehler meant when he told John Wesley: "Preach faith till you have it ...!" Just as it takes time for a mustard seed to mature and produce, so it takes time for a Christian's faith to mature and produce. Our part in the timing is to be ready through discipline, and accept God's timing for the growth of fruit. That is our Lord's three-fold formula for increasing our faith and it is our Discipleship Lesson #39:

Discipleship Lesson #39

To increase his faith and produce fruit for his Lord the disciple must start with Christ and Christ alone as the object of his faith; he must give substance to his faith by dying to himself so Christ can live in him; and finally he must accept God's timing for growth and fruit.

Jesus says that the secret to having a faith that changes things is having the right object, the right substance, and the right timing to our faith. Otherwise our faith will do more harm than good. Learning this secret can truly be the difference between life and death.

My first encounter with the mustard plant was as a small boy going out into the field with my mother to pick mustard greens. I remember how fascinated I was as Mother explained to me how unusual this mustard plant was because it contained both life and death!

She took some of the tiny mustard seed in her hands and said, "In these tiny seeds are both death and life, for the oil in them that made the deadly mustard gas which poisoned your Uncle Clarence in World War I, also makes the tasty mustard you like so much on your hamburgers." After we got home with our sacks of mustard greens and cleaned the leaves, she held one of the leaves up and said, "This leaf too contains both deadly poison and life-giving food." My childish mind could not understand such a great mystery. Mother said, "Come and I'll show you." What she showed me was what she called "parboiling," which was simply boiling the leaves twice. She explained that the first boiling water drew out all of the poison from the leaves and that this water had to be discarded.

"That's the secret," she said, "to cooking good, tasty, healthy, black mustard greens. If you don't do it that way they're liable to kill you. If you do it right they are about the healthiest thing you can eat!"

I thought of that childhood lesson as I studied my Lord's words about faith and mustard seed this week, and as I did I heard Him saying about the same thing to me. He said: "The secret to genuine faith is the right object, the right substance and the right timing. If you don't get those right, it's liable to kill you. If you do get them right, you shall live abundantly now and eternally and you will produce much fruit!"

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #39?
2. What is the 3-fold formula for increasing our faith?
3. List the “faith is” statements in this sermon. From these statements write a definition of faith.

Search the Scriptures

4. Who or what is to be the object of our faith?
5. Who determines the growth of our faith? (1 Cor 3:7)
6. Faith is a gift (Rom 12:3; Eph 2:8). God takes the initiative in our faith, but He has given us responsibility in cooperating with the work He is doing in us. From the following scriptures note the things that are to be the outcome of our faith.

James 2:17

Rom 14:23

2 Thess 1:3

1 Pet 1:7

Gal 5:6

Internalize God's Word

7. As we look at the Old Testament saints mentioned in Hebrews 11 we see faith demonstrated. The following verbs are taken from this portion of Hebrews 11. As you look at these words allow the Lord to speak to you.

worshipped God | walked with God | worked with God | obeyed | went | was enabled |
persevered | strengthened

Memory scripture: Romans 10:17

Notes

Sermon 40: Moving Beyond Duty To Discipleship

Arthur Miller, the renowned American playwright, in discussing drama and the stage, said that in any successful play there must be that special something which makes the audience say to themselves: “My God — that’s me!”

The same thing is true for us before we can move from where we are now into a deeper and more meaningful life with Christ. Especially is this true in our scripture, *The Parable of the Bondservant* in the 17th chapter of Luke, verses 7-10. Until we are able to look at this bondservant and exclaim, “My God — that’s me!” I seriously doubt if we can make the move we must make in order to become genuine disciples for our Lord. The parable is short and to the point. The bondservant works hard in the field all day, and then comes home after dark, but instead of getting to sit down to a meal himself he must do his duty and serve his master’s meal first. Don’t feel sorry for him, says Jesus, for he only did what was commanded of him. Then Jesus concludes with this penetrating remark:

“So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty”” (Lk 17:10).

Here, Jesus is laying before us two ways of life: One that leads to life, and another that leads to destruction. Perhaps the most accurate way to name these two ways of life is to call the one which leads to destruction “a sense of duty,” for this is what Jesus calls it, and the way that leads to life, “a sense of responsibility.” The trouble is, there is such a fine line between the two that we often do what we do out of “a sense of duty,” but think we are really demonstrating “a sense of responsibility.” If we’re ever going to move beyond duty to responsibility and genuine discipleship, we must be able to distinguish between duty and responsibility. Before we can move to the place of “a child of God” we must first be able to see ourselves as bondservants.

I. Two ways of life

Perhaps the best way to do that is to draw some plain pictures which show us at different stages and in different situations in life. For the first picture I’ll start with myself and my wife as children. We both grew up in small towns. I grew up in a small town in southern Oklahoma and Harriett grew up in a small town in southern Kansas. Although we didn’t know each other at the time, both of our parents insisted that we study piano as children.

Well, as a fourth or fifth grade boy I wasn’t too keen on coming home after

Scripture

Luke 17:7-10

Text

So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”

Luke 17:10

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school and practicing the piano for an hour before I could go out and play football or baseball with the guys, but those were the rules laid down by my parents. I'd rush home, set the big alarm clock on top of the upright piano and begin practicing my "C" scale over and over; but all of the time my thoughts were on the guys playing ball. My, how slow the hands of that alarm clock moved. In fact, I must admit that sometimes I was so sure the hands had stopped moving that I had to help them along a little. Somehow I would get through that hour of "my father's business," then rush out and get about the business that really mattered — my business.

While up in that little town in southern Kansas at the same time the girl who was to be my wife also rushed home from school and sat down at the piano to practice — but for an entirely different reason! She didn't practice to get the dull chore over with, but to get on with the great opportunity her parents afforded her to become a musician and enjoy some of the finer things of life. Here's the point: I was practicing out of "a sense of duty." Harriett was practicing out of "a sense of responsibility."

Consequently, I learned very little besides the elementary "C" scale, and moved on to something else as soon as the climate allowed; while Harriett moved beyond the "C" scale to more complicated ones and then on to Chopin, Beethoven, and Bach, and ended up majoring in piano in college. Today, my fingers are stiff and the only thing I can play on the piano is to stumble through the "C" scale laboriously; while Harriett reaps joy each day as she sits at the keyboard and makes music. Physically we did the same thing each day, but to me our Lord would have to say the same thing He said to the bondservant and for the same reason: "You are an unworthy child; you have only done what was your duty!" You see, the difference was not in what we did, the difference was the spirit in which we did it! The difference was in our attitude.

Now, move to a situation in a busy office. Two employees arrive on time promptly at 8:30. Both are good at their jobs. Perhaps one is you. One employee goes directly to his desk and gets about the day's work efficiently, intent on giving a day's work for a day's pay. In addition he is aware of the needs of others in the office and the opportunities to help them be better producers too. The other goes through the same physical motions and is just as intent on giving a day's work for a day's pay. The job is the important thing, not the dozens of opportunities to help others. They are distractions to be ignored. The first sees the need of a team spirit and the opportunity to build it, while the second wears blinders. To the second who is like the bondservant, our Lord must say, "You are an unworthy employee, for you have only done what was your duty!" Why? Because that employee had only a "sense of duty" and no "sense of responsibility" to walk through the doors of opportunity that opened each day. That employee was making a living; the other was making a life!

Move now to any one of our outstanding hospitals in Tulsa and watch two

pastors, or two physicians for that matter, make their daily rounds. The first looks at his cards and realizes there are ten patients he must see in this hospital; which means he can't spend more than an average of five minutes with each one if he's going to get around to all the other hospitals and all his other duties that day. Very conscientiously, he goes into each room, visits with each patient, and with real professionalism, has a kind, encouraging word for each. He checks what he needs to check and says what he needs to say. The pastor may even read a passage of scripture and say a brief prayer. No doubt the patients feel more secure because of this personal attention and the pastor or physician feels better too because he's done his duty.

Now, watch the other pastor or physician as he moves in and out of the same rooms in basically the same way, but there's a difference. Time is not wasted, but neither is he in bondage to time — a bondservant! He's no more qualified in what he does or says than the first one, but there's an openness about him that's hard to describe in words but you can see it and you can feel it. Openness to God in one direction — openness to the patient in another; eager to avail himself of the opportunity to be an instrument for God's love and God's healing power. He's free for God to use him as God wills, not bound by a sense of duty and professionalism. Can you hear our Lord's words to the first, "You are an unworthy pastor — you are an unworthy physician; for you have only done what was your duty!"

Move on now to one of our many nursing homes or homes for the elderly in Tulsa and watch two different grown children visit their elderly parents. They both come regularly each day. They both stay about the same length of time and each gives basically the same physical assistance to his/her parent; but to one our Lord will say, "You are an unworthy son or unworthy daughter, for you have only done what was your duty!" Why? Because one does what has to be done through a sense of duty and the other does it with a sense of responsibility which means that he/she seizes the opportunity to be used by God to bring light where there is darkness, love where there is loneliness, healing where there is pain, and life where hope for life is gone.

Now, move with me inside any church, anywhere in the world, but to help us visualize it better let's make it our own church. Wherever you look you will see Christians who look very much alike, who are doing the same thing; but there all resemblance ends. Side-by-side they sing in the choir or worship in their pews, but one does it out of a sense of duty and the other out of a sense of responsibility. The same is true when different ministers step up to the lectern or into the pulpit, or teachers teach, helpers help, worshipers worship, servers serve, pray-ers pray and givers give!

Nearly 40 years ago when I commanded men in combat I realized, sort of intuitively I guess, that absolutely the best trait a person can have in life is a sense of responsibility. It is what makes the difference between a good

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soldier and a bad one. I always looked for this trait, especially before I promoted a man to be a non-com, because these were the guys who gave an outfit esprit-de-corps; these were the leaders who got the outfit going again when it bogged down or was pinned down. These were the soldiers who did the impossible in face of enemy superiority. These were the Americans who stormed the beaches in Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Normandy, led the march across France, took the Remagen Bridge intact and silenced the German war machine for good! Yes, I realized the importance of a sense of responsibility way back there, but often I was fooled by someone substituting for it a sense of duty, for in so many ways they look exactly alike. Even though they look alike, often I could feel or sense the difference, but I couldn't quite put my finger on that fine difference.

It wasn't until Jesus showed me that fine difference in *The Parable of The Bondservant* that I was able to put my finger on it. Have you recognized the difference this morning? Are you able to put your finger on it now? The Bible says it's the difference between life and death. One way leads to life, the other way leads to death. "The demon duty" says one leading psychiatrist, "is the greatest enemy of the human race and causes more stress, suffering, neurosis and disease than any other single thing." Well, Jesus verifies this; but Jesus goes on to give us an answer and tell us that a sense of responsibility is life's greatest attribute and the way to have life and have it abundantly.

Do you realize what we're talking about today? We are talking about nothing less than the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. We are talking about the difference between a life of law and a life of grace. We are talking about the difference between life and death. We are talking about the difference between what the Bible calls "a natural person" and "a spiritual person." There is only one way that a person can move beyond duty to genuine discipleship, and that is to move from a life of law to a life of grace.

II. A life of law

What is a life of law? A life of law is nothing more or less than living life out of a sense of duty. It is being a bondservant — in bondage to a sense of duty. From a Christian's standpoint it is trying to order your own life and the lives of others to God's prescribed pattern for life by following specific outward religious rules and forms. Notice the end is right, but the means are wrong; that's always the way it is with a life of law. We're not talking about just what you refer to as religion; we are talking about all of life — the way you live day in and day out.

Let's look at one of the most common things in life, but first, let me say there is the danger that some of you will be so overwhelmed with an ingrained sense of duty and a life of law that you will miss the point altogether. Follow me all of the way before you judge, for the subject is

marriage and divorce. Here is a picture that we see over and over today. A marriage breaks down between a husband and a wife who are faithful, sincere church members. They are miserable. They talk about divorce as a way out with their Christian friends, and of course their friends know that God's plan for them is not divorce, so immediately the counsel the couple receives from these sincere, devoted Christian friends goes like this: "Why, it's out of the question for you to divorce, for you are Christians. You must stick it out regardless. It is your Christian duty to keep your marriage together and pray for God to change it!" Now, these Christian friends mean well. In fact, they honestly believe they are following God's Word and giving the only Christian counseling that can be given under the circumstances. I know, for I thought the same way for years, and I have had some very dedicated, sincere, Bible-believing Christians tell me that it is my duty as a pastor to also counsel couples in the same way.

Do you see what this means? It means that you are holding up a life of law as the ideal Christian way of life, while Jesus says that is the very first thing which must go before anyone can be a Christian! Furthermore, it is placing a burden upon that couple which the Bible says no human being can bear, no not one! It is telling them to remain bondservants — bound to a sense of duty until God gives them freedom and a sense of responsibility. The Bible says and the point of the gospel is they can never be free and responsible as long as they live a life of law. It's telling them they must live out their lives under the old covenant, which no person can do, instead of offering the hope of the new covenant and new life! Dear friends, that's not good news that's bad news!

The good news is they have already been set free from their bonds as bondservants. That's why Jesus came to earth with the grace of God. The good news is they are free now to move from a sense of duty to a sense of responsibility — from a life of law to a life of grace. To do it they must first realize the difference between the two and it is a very fine line which many Christians never recognize.

The place to start in helping a couple like that is not with law, but with grace! The answer is not to be a Lawgiver demanding a stronger sense of duty and a stricter adherence to the law. The place to start is where Jesus started with the bondservant — helping them face up to this fact, "You are an unworthy husband or wife, for you have only done what was your duty!"

You have been living by the law, trying to order your own life and the life of your mate to God's prescribed pattern by a set of rules. Consequently, you have never had ears to actually hear the gospel — the good news! You haven't been able to hear it because you are still living under the old covenant — a life of law and you are burdened down with this bad news. You have been such a bondservant to duty that you've missed the good news that Christ has already set you free and made you a child of God, an

heir of Christ. It's time for you to move beyond duty; it's time to hear the good news and become responsible. In Christ, God is offering you the love you need in order to love an unlovely wife or husband, and through your love make that mate into what both you and God want him to be. In Christ, God is offering you a marriage that is truly made in heaven with God's grace. Before you can experience this heaven on earth, you must move from the old covenant to the new covenant — from a life of law to a life of grace!

III. From law to grace

How? Jesus says in the third chapter of John, and Paul says in the eighth chapter of Romans that you do it by being born again into a spiritual person, by which they both mean that you must first crucify that old bondservant within you that binds you to a sense of duty and then permit Jesus Christ to resurrect you into a responsible child of God, who as an heir of Christ now finds not only the desire, but also the power to live responsibly and joyfully at the same time. That's what's meant by a life of grace and it is the point of our Lord's Discipleship Lesson #40:

Discipleship Lesson #40

We can be Jesus' disciples only when we live a life of grace, not law.

That's Discipleship Lesson #40. Christ will never permit His disciples to pollute His amazing grace with petty legalisms. Before we can be disciples we must stop legalizing the gospel. He will not permit anyone to be His ambassador who tries to tack on any sense of duty to His unconditional offer of God's grace. We are not called to be scribes or Pharisees who interpret the law; we are called to be witnesses to the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ — the only thing in all heaven and earth that can save the world and give new life. That's why Jesus painted this picture of the bondservant and why He spoke the words:

"You are an unworthy servant, for you have only done what was your duty!"

He did it so that, in the words of Arthur Miller, the playwright, you and I and every disciple could realize "My God — that's me!" and then truly do something about moving from duty to genuine discipleship where we become fully-credentialed ambassadors for the "amazing grace" of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Explore the Sermon

1. What is Discipleship Lesson #40?
2. Name the two ways of life mentioned in this discipleship lesson comparing the outcome of each.
3. In our sermon we see “sense of duty” and “sense of responsibility” contrasted. Explain the difference.

Search the Scriptures

4. The law was not designed to do what the Holy Spirit alone can do. What was the purpose of the law? (Gal 3:11, 24).
5. How do we enter into this “law of life” (Gal 3:2-3).
6. To be free from the law does not mean lawless living. According to Galatians 5:16 and Matthew 5:17 how can we live lawful lives if not by the law?

Internalize God's Word

7. When we live a “life of grace” by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit Himself will produce godly fruit in our lives. Read Galatians 5:22-23 reviewing the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Are there areas where you have quenched the Spirit's production of any particular fruit in your life? Allow Him to show you.

Memory scripture: Matthew 5:17

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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

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #31

As disciples we must have a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ, a working relationship with our Living God, and a love-relationship with other people.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #32

To get a disciple's heart that aches for the lost and never gives up on them, you must systematically discipline yourself in using the means of grace: prayer, worship, Bible study, Holy Communion, and Christian fellowship.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #33

To be a true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ we must have a servant's heart.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #34

A disciple must have a charitable heart that sees others as Christ sees them, because Christ abides in him and he abides in Christ.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #35

A disciple will exchange his money for eternal treasures.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #36

A disciple must have only one master, and that master must be God as revealed by Jesus Christ.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #37

Jesus charges us, as disciples, to feed the Bread of Life to a hungry world.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #38

Our responsibility as disciples is to love one another genuinely in the church.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #39

To increase his faith and produce fruit for his Lord the disciple must start with Christ and Christ alone as the object of his faith; he must give substance to his faith by dying to himself so Christ can live in him; and finally he must accept God's timing for growth and fruit.

Journey Into Discipleship

Discipleship Lesson #40

We can be Jesus' disciples only when we live a life of grace, not law.

Sermon 33
Galations 5:13

You, my brothers and sisters,
were called to be free.
But do not use your freedom to indulge
the flesh; rather, serve one another
humbly in love.
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 32
Romans 5:5

And hope does not put us to shame,
because God's love has been poured out
into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,
who has been given to us.
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 31
1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy,
it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not
dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not
easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with
the truth. It always protects, always trusts,
always hopes, always perseveres.
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 36
Romans 11:33 and 36

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and
knowledge of God! How unsearchable his
judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

For from him and through him and for him are
all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 35
Luke 6:38

"Give, and it will be given to you.
A good measure, pressed down,
shaken together and running over,
will be poured into your lap.
For with the measure you use,
it will be measured to you."
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 34
Romans 2:1

You, therefore, have no excuse,
you who pass judgment on someone else,
for at whatever point you judge another,
you are condemning yourself, because you
who pass judgment do the same things.
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 39
Romans 10:17

Consequently, faith comes from hearing
the message, and the message is heard
through the word about Christ.
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 38
John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you:
Love one another. As I have loved you,
so you must love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are
my disciples, if you love one another."
(NIV, ©2011)

Sermon 37
1 John 3:1a

See what great love the Father
has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!
(KJV)

Sermon 40
Matthew 5:17

"Do not think that I have come to abolish
the Law or the Prophets; I have not come
to abolish them but to fulfill them."
(NIV, ©2011)