

# Journey Into Discipleship

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Volume 5  
*Sermon 41 through Sermon 50*

Dr. L.D. Thomas

**Volume 5**

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,

Congratulations! Welcome to the final volume of *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 have been blessed to have walked this journey with you. Please know that we are still 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!

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

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## Table of Contents

		<b>Assignment Date</b>
Introduction	1	_____
Sermon 41: The Staying Faith That Matters	7	Oct 30 _____
Sermon 42: Called to Accountability	15	Nov 6 _____
Sermon 43: Pray and Don't Lose Heart	23	Nov 13 _____
Sermon 44: The Eyes of a Disciple	31	Nov 20 _____
Sermon 45: Discipleship Is Childlikeness	39	Nov 27 _____
Sermon 46: Discipleship Is Commitment	47	Dec 4 _____
Sermon 47: Discipleship Is Taking Up the Cross	55	Dec 11 _____
Sermon 48: You Are the Light of the World!	63	Dec 18 _____
Sermon 49: The Transforming Power of Christ	71	Dec 25 _____
Sermon 50: Journey Ends—Discipleship Begins!	79	Jan 1 _____
Appendix	87	
- <b>Steps in Praying God's Word</b>	89	
- <b>Scripture Cards</b>		



## Introduction

### Purpose

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

### Three-Part Plan of Worksheets

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES

### **Planning the Discussion**

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

### **Leading the Discussion**

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

### **Foundational Beliefs**

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

#### **God's Part**

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

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

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

#### ***God's Word is Creative and Sustaining***

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

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

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

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

### **God's Word Accomplishes Purpose**

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

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

### **God's Word is Living and Active**

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

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

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

### **God's Word is Life-Giving**

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

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

### **God's Word is Healing**

God heals through His Word.

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

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

## **Our Part**

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

## NOTES

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

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

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

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

## Methods

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

### Scripture Memory

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

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

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

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

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

### **Scriptural Journaling and Paraphrase**

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

### **Praying God's Word**

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

## NOTES

### Helpful Tool

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



## Sermon 41: The Staying Faith That Matters

When Jesus and the Twelve reached the border between Galilee and Samaria on their *"journey into discipleship,"* ten lepers, standing at a distance as the Jewish law required, called out, *"Jesus, have mercy on us! Have pity on us! Heal us! Give us new life!"* According to the Jewish law, even if Jesus did heal them they could not rejoin society until they had been pronounced clean by the priests. Jesus said to them, *"Go, show yourself to the priests."* Luke tells us that as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he realized he was cleansed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. Then Jesus asked, *"Were not ten cleansed! Where are the other nine? Did you alone return to give thanks and praise God?"* Turning to the healed leper who did return, Jesus said, *"Arise, go your way: Your faith has made you whole!"*

The Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates this last word "well," but the word "whole" used in the KJV more nearly captures the truth Jesus demonstrates here. This will become more clear as we look at the four truths Jesus is revealing to us.

### I. Misery and hopelessness

First, Jesus wants to impress indelibly upon our minds the misery and the hopelessness of these ten lepers when they come to Him. The most devastating disease in ancient times was leprosy. It was literally a living death; the law required that a leper be treated as if he were dead. Today, thank God, there are new drugs which will cure leprosy, but in those days there was no cure; a person's only hope was a miracle.

Under Jewish law, the person with leprosy was segregated from the rest of society. Our English word "quarantine" comes directly from this Jewish law and practice. In Italy in the 14th century people noticed in times of plague the Jews were less severely hit than anyone else. The authorities came to the conclusion that it was because of the Jewish law requiring the isolation of anyone who touched an unclean person or a dead body. The Italian authorities also required anyone who came in contact with a suspected case of the plague to be isolated for forty days. The Italian word for 40 is "quaranta" and that is how the word "quarantine" found its way into our dictionary. In biblical times, there were three different kinds of leprosy, but all meant loss of limbs, disfigurement and eventual death — a slow, agonizing death. In the most deadly kind of leprosy death came usually within ten years, but with the other two kinds it lingered on for twenty or thirty years. Can you think of a more miserable existence? There is no

#### Scripture

Luke 17:11-19

#### Text

The ten lepers said to Jesus, "Master, have mercy on us." ... as they went they were cleansed ... Then one of them turned back ... giving thanks ... and Jesus said to him, "Arise, go your way: Your faith has made you whole."

Luke 17:13-16, 19

cure, you are completely isolated from society and despised by everyone. Gradually, your face is grotesquely disfigured, and your fingers, toes, and eventually your limbs drop off. Your nerve trunks are affected and you lose all sensation and sensitivity. You can't even look forward to a speedy death!

That is the misery and the hopelessness of these ten lepers when Jesus comes their way. This is the misery and hopelessness of us all until Jesus comes our way too! We are infected with an even more deadly disease than leprosy! It is, in fact, the most dreaded disease in all creation according to the Bible, and the Bible calls this deadly disease by the name of "sin." Not only is it, like leprosy, a lingering, crippling, deadly disease; also, like leprosy, no man can cure it. It, too, isolates us from fellowship with both God and our fellow men. It is a slow, lingering, painful death. It disfigures and makes us into a grotesque image of what God means us to be. It makes us insensitive not only to God, but also to the needs and hurts of others. The harder we try to cure it ourselves, the more it spreads and the more damage it does, until finally, like these ten lepers in our scripture, we find ourselves standing at a distance, crying out, "O Lord, have mercy on us! Have pity on us! Heal us! Give us new life!"

## II. "Beginning faith"

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The second truth Jesus is revealing to us here concerns what we must do to be freed from this lingering, painful death. I think we can best understand this step if we call it "beginning faith." Look at these ten lepers as they come to Jesus. All ten have come to the point in their lives where they know Jesus is their only hope. Then, here He comes, passing their way. My, how their hearts leap with expectancy and joy! Their hope quickly fails as they realize their terrible dilemma: the Jewish law prohibits them from going up to Jesus so He can lay hands on them. It prohibits them from having personal contact with any person who is not a leper. In fact, if the wind is blowing from their direction, they must keep at a minimum distance of 150 feet. Also, one of the ravages of leprosy is on the vocal chords so their voices are hoarse and weak. It must have taken all that was in them to cry out, "*O Jesus, have mercy on us! Jesus, have pity on us. Heal us and make us whole!*"

I wonder if on May 24, 1738, John Wesley had not reached the same point in life these ten lepers had reached? John Wesley thought he had believed in Christ all of his life, and I'm confident he did believe intellectually and morally. Yet for ten years he had isolated himself behind the cloth of the clergy and put on a mask of belief, all the while really trusting in himself! He trusted in his own learning and his own goodness. Then, at a meeting on Aldersgate Street, John Wesley saw Jesus pass his way and recognized his utter hopelessness and misery without Him! Like these ten lepers, John Wesley cried out from a distance for he did not yet know Christ personally: "*O Jesus, have mercy on me! Jesus, have pity on me! Jesus, heal me and*

*give me new life!”* What happened next John Wesley described like this in his journal:

*About a quarter before nine, while the leader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*

That’s exactly what these ten lepers did that freed them from a lingering, painful sentence of death — they trusted in Christ and Christ alone! That’s what I mean by “beginning faith!” That is what John Wesley did on Aldersgate Street that delivered him from his sentence, too, and opened the door to an entirely new life — he trusted in Christ and Christ alone! He honestly and sincerely began with Christ.

This is the way to be freed from the lingering, painful, disfiguring death of sin! This is the miraculous cure that frees us from the deadly grasp that sin has on us. The Bible calls this miraculous cure by the technical name of “justification,” which simply means being cleansed from the ravages of sin and restored to our rightful place as a child of God, just as these ten lepers were cleansed from the ravages of leprosy and restored to their rightful place in society. The Bible is also clear about two other truths. First, we can receive justification only through faith, and second, justification is only the beginning. That is why I call this faith “beginning faith.” Beginning faith — the kind of faith we see in these ten lepers and in the founder of Methodism at Aldersgate — is not just intellectual assent to the divinity of Jesus, for even the Devil knows and acknowledges that. Nor is it trying to be faithful to the teaching of Jesus by leading a moral life. It is one thing and one thing only: it is trusting your whole life to Christ and Christ alone! Trying to follow Jesus as a religious and moral teacher without first trusting your whole life to Him will leave you hard and self-righteous, like John Wesley before Aldersgate. To simply believe intellectually that Jesus is the Son of God without trusting your whole life to Him will give you merely a philosophy and a religion to intellectualize and argue about from a distance — like John Wesley before Aldersgate. The Bible says without equivocation that the only way to receive this miraculous cure of justification is through “beginning faith,” that is, through trusting in Christ and Christ alone as Savior! The Bible is just as emphatic about the fact that this is only the beginning and there is so much more!

### **III. Two aspects to salvation**

The third truth Jesus is revealing to us here is that Jesus saves us from sin so we can become disciples and live victoriously now as well as eternally. The Bible is clear that all ten of the lepers were healed of their deadly

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The Works of John Wesley—Third Edition, Volume I, pg. 103. Grand Rapids: Baker.

disease, but only one returned praising God and offering himself as a disciple for our Lord.

The Bible specifically says, and Paul explains in great detail in the book of Romans, that there are two distinct aspects to salvation. First is the aspect we have just examined, the miraculous cure from this crippling deadly disease of sin — the cure we call “justification.” The second stage is the new life which God begins to give us after we are cured of the ravages of the deadly disease of sin and truly belong to Him. Then, according to the Bible, He gives us a new mind, a new character, a new purpose, new power, and new love. The Bible calls this second stage “new life in Christ” or sometimes by the technical name of “sanctification”; but Jesus simply speaks of becoming His disciple. He is talking about discipleship — that exciting partnership with Him that brings us victorious and fruitful living now and prepares us for eternal life.

The point is, God is never satisfied with just healing us of the deadly disease of sin. That healing sets us free and enables us to begin the exciting *Journey Into Discipleship*, but it is only the beginning, and, oh, there is so much more! Unfortunately, still today, like these lepers of that day long ago, only about one Christian in every ten goes on to this exciting new life in Christ as a disciple. Most Christians simply accept the healing from sin that Christ gives them at the time of their conversion, and honestly think that is all the Christian faith has for them. How sad! For here in our scripture, Jesus makes it abundantly clear how we can go on to this exciting new life in Christ called “discipleship.”

#### **IV. “Staying faith”**

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How do we receive this exciting new life in Christ and go on to genuine discipleship? Jesus tells us exactly how we must receive it in His final words to the one leper who returned praising God and falling at the feet of Jesus offering to serve Him. Jesus says to him, “Arise, go your way; your faith has made you whole!”

Strange He should say that, for we’ve already seen that it was faith which brought the cure to all ten lepers. Jesus says to this one: “Your faith has made you whole!” Now, what’s the difference between his faith and the faith of the other nine lepers who were healed but did not return? The difference is no less than the difference between total salvation and only half a loaf, that’s what it is! The other nine lepers had faith; don’t deny them that. They had the faith they needed to trust Christ and Christ alone for their miraculous cure and through this faith they were healed, too. How different from the faith of this one who returned and was made whole! The difference was this: the faith of the nine trusted only their old, diseased, disfigured, crippled, sin-filled bodies to Jesus, while the faith of this one leper who returned, trusted his healed, healthy, new life to Jesus!

The nine came to Jesus to be healed and then go their own way, while the one came not only to be healed but to serve Jesus with his new life and to go Jesus' way! Their faith led only to deliverance from sin and death, while his faith led not only to deliverance, but went on to lead him into that exciting, new, power-filled life which Jesus wanted to give him. Their faith simply made it possible for God to begin to bless them and begin His work in them, while his faith went on to receive these blessings and new life. Their faith brought healing, but his faith not only brought healing; it also brought wholeness! This is what Jesus wants us to see here. He wants us to see that it takes both "beginning faith" and "staying faith" to have wholeness! "Beginning faith" makes us Christians, yes; but it takes "staying faith" to make us disciples! "Beginning faith" makes us children of God, yes; but it takes "staying faith" to receive the blessings, the power, the wisdom, the gifts and the love of God!

This "beginning faith" is best described by the word "conversion" or the term "born again" — which means changing the direction of our lives; and it comes as a result of an act of your will. To have this kind of faith which enables you to begin as a Christian you must specifically will to trust Christ and Christ alone as your Savior from sin and damnation. It is a specific decision of your will that you make at a specific time to trust in Christ and Christ alone.

The best word to describe "staying faith" is the word "discipleship," which is not the result of an act of will but the response of a joyful, grateful spirit. Discipleship comes out of gratitude for what Christ has done for us in saving us from that painful, crippling death and giving us new life — eternal life!

Look at what the Bible says about the one leper who returns. When he realizes what Jesus has done for him, his action is not so much a decision as it is the spontaneous response of a grateful spirit for what Christ has done for him. When it comes home to him what has really happened to him, the Bible says that he spontaneously begins to sing praises to God, and rushes back to Jesus, falls at His feet praising Him, thanking Him, and offering himself as His servant — His disciple! That's always what it takes to be a disciple: It takes the response of a grateful spirit, and that is our discipleship lesson.

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### **Discipleship Lesson #41**

**Genuine discipleship is always the response of a grateful spirit for what God has done for us in Christ.**

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Let me illustrate this truth. Last Friday I attended a luncheon for those who will participate in the Telethon for Crippled Children. Sitting next to me was the volunteer producer of this telethon, whose husband is a banker in Tulsa. In response to my questions she said that she had been involved

NOTES

with the telethon in one way or another for the last nine years. Of the four children in his family her husband was the only one who was not stricken with hereditary birth defects. One of his brothers died in infancy, and none was expected to live to adulthood. However, one brother did live and now at thirty-one years of age is confined to a wheelchair. She went on to tell me that she and her husband have three healthy children all now in college. Then she made this profound statement:

“I am so grateful to God for my healthy husband and my healthy children that I had to give myself to Him in this way. This, I felt, was the best way to show my gratitude.”

That’s it, isn’t it? That’s what our Lord means by discipleship. He means the response of a grateful spirit for what God has done for us in Christ. If you have begun this journey with Jesus through an experience of conversion — “beginning faith” — but have never gone on to genuine discipleship — “staying faith” — then I urge you to do two things. First, stop and recognize — honestly realize — what God has done for you in Christ. Let this truth sink in and permeate your whole mind and spirit — your whole being, until you are so filled with gratitude and thanksgiving that it must flow out of you in praising Him.

When that happens, go on to the second thing. Return to Jesus with “staying faith” and as the response of your grateful spirit, offer yourself to Him as a genuine disciple — to serve Him daily. When you do, I promise you will hear Him say to you the same words He spoke to this one leper: “Arise, go your way, your ‘staying faith’ has made you whole!”

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### **Discipleship Lesson #41**

**Genuine discipleship is always the response of a grateful spirit for what God has done for us in Christ.**

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## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #41?
2. What in our discipleship lesson is compared to the dreaded disease of leprosy, and what must we do to be freed from this dreaded disease?
3. Jesus saves us from this deadly disease so we can live victoriously now. Once we are freed, how do we receive this exciting new life?
4. The best word to describe “beginning faith” is...  
“Staying faith” is best described by the word...
5. Compare the nine healed lepers to the one who went on to serve Jesus with his new life.
  - Their faith led only to...
  - His faith led into...
  - Their faith brought...
  - His faith brought...

## Search the Scriptures

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6. A key ingredient to “staying faith” is a joyful, grateful spirit. From the following scriptures list some of the benefits for which we are to be grateful to the Lord.

James 1:17

Psalms 103:3

Psalms 103:4

Psalms 103:5

Psalms 86:15

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

## Internalize God's Word

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7. Ingratitude is one of the most deadly sins Christians commit. Take this time to “count your blessings” in an attitude of thanksgiving.

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**Memory scripture: Psalm 103:1-5**

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**Notes**

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## Sermon 42: Called to Accountability

On March 10, 1758, sixteen days before Easter, John Wesley was invited to preach in St. Paul's Church, Bedford, England, during the session of the Assizes. The Assizes in England refer to the periodic sessions of the High Court of Justice held in the various counties of England, where prisoners are brought before the judges for trial and sentencing. The sermon John Wesley preached on this occasion became in time the most famous of all of his sermons. That's saying something when you realize he preached over 20,000 sermons in his lifetime! John Wesley used this secular day, when the judges of the High Court of Justice looked down at those charged before them and pronounced sentence of either life or death, to point up the most momentous of all days, the final Day of Judgment — that day, when, in the words of Paul in Romans 14:10,

*"We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."*

This is exactly the point our Lord Jesus Christ is making in Luke 17:20-37 which is the 42nd discipleship lesson in our *Journey Into Discipleship*. As Jesus makes this final trip to Jerusalem with His disciples, He is giving them and all who come after them the same message Paul expressed in Romans 14, verse 12:

*"In that day every one of us must give account of himself to God!"*

In other words, Jesus not only calls us to discipleship; He also calls us to accountability!

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### Discipleship Lesson #42

**A disciple must be accountable and ready for Judgment Day.**

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As Jesus nears the end of this final journey, He reminds us that there will be an end for all of us, an end to history, an end to time--and on that day He will come again as the Son of Man to judge all men. I wonder why we don't preach more or hear more sermons today on The Great Assize, which is the title Wesley gave his sermon — *The Great Judgment Day*. It is the most important day in all history; are we afraid to face it? Are we afraid to look at ourselves in the white light of that final judgment day?

That's part of it, certainly. Even more than that; it is because we are rapidly becoming a people who have lost the sense and the meaning of our high calling in life, our calling to accountability. We all want to do our own thing and be accountable to no one! We see accountability as something which limits and binds us, instead of as the doorway into abundant life, which the Bible says it truly is.

Scripture

Luke 17:20-37

Text

"As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was in the days of Lot ... so will it be on the day when the Son of man is revealed... Remember Lot's wife"

*Luke 17:26-28a, 30, 32*

Our loss of accountability can be seen on almost every level of life today. We can see it in children and youth who no longer honor their fathers and mothers and who thumb their noses at authorities in school. We see it in husbands and wives who totally ignore their accountability to each other and to God in their sacred marriage bond. We see it in employees hiding behind union contracts and labor laws to do as little as they can without genuine accountability. We see it in a nation of people on the very brink of economic disaster because of astronomical and irresponsible government spending, still crying out for more handouts and giveaways without any accountability. We see it in a whole generation of people in America insisting upon doing their own thing and being rewarded for it, without being accountable to parents, spouse, employer, government, fellow man or God!

As we travel through this section of Luke on our *Journey Into Discipleship* we can't dodge the issue, for we must take each passage of scripture as it comes. We come now to these important eighteen verses in Luke 17:20-37 in which Jesus holds before us the final judgment day when we shall be called to accountability. As we seek to understand what Jesus is saying here, let's take the four headings that John Wesley used in his famous sermon on *The Great Assize* and dress them in modern clothes so they make sense to us. These four headings are:

1. Circumstances preceding the Judgment
2. Circumstances relating to and during the Judgment
3. Circumstances following the Judgment
4. Practical considerations about the Judgment

### **I. Circumstances preceding the Judgment**

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Jesus says there will be specific signs before His coming again to judge us. In sermon XIX, "*Be Ready!*," we looked at all fifteen of the signs that Jesus mentions, and saw that in almost every generation since His ascension all of them have been fulfilled except for the last two — the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from the sky. What does Jesus emphasize in this scripture about the circumstances preceding His coming? He says in our text:

*"As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, as it was in the days of Lot — they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all — so will it be on the day when the Son of man is revealed"* (Lk 17:26-30).

What Jesus wants us to see is simply this: the Day of Judgment is going to come on a day just like any other day. It will come when we least expect it, when we are going about all of our regular activities — eating, drinking, partying, sleeping, getting married, rearing our families, doing our work. It will be a day exactly like any other day, except it will be the Final Day. According to Wesley, the Bible says these things shall then happen on this *Great Assize Day*, after earthquakes, floods, storm, the sun darkened, moon turned into blood, and stars falling from heaven:

*“And then shall be heard the universal shout, from all of the companies of heaven, followed by the ‘voice of the archangel’, proclaiming the approach of the Son of God and Man, ‘and the trumpet of God’ sounding an alarm to all that sleep in the dust of the earth. (1 Thess iv. 16.) In consequence of this, all the graves shall open, and the bodies of men arise. The sea also shall give up the dead which are therein, (Rev. xx.13,) and every one shall rise with ‘his own body;’ his own in substance, although so changed in its properties as we cannot now conceive. ‘For this corruptible will’ then ‘put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality.’ (1 Cor. xv. 53.) ... At the same time, ‘the Son of man shall send forth His angels’ over all the earth; and they shall ‘gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.’ (Matt xxiv. 31.) And the Lord himself shall come with clouds, in his own glory, and the glory of his Father ... and shall sit upon the throne of his glory. ‘And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, and shall set the sheep,’ the good, ‘on his right hand, and the goats,’ the wicked, ‘upon the left.’” (Matt xxv.31,&c.)\**

## II. The circumstances relating to and during the Judgment

The Bible says that the Person who shall do the judging of the world is Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. John says in his Gospel:

*“The Father ... has given all judgment to the Son... and has given Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of man” (Jn 5:22 and 27).*

Because the divine Son humbled Himself and emptied Himself to take on the likeness of man, now as both Son of Man tempted as we are tempted, and Son of God with the mercy and love of God, He is the Perfect Judge on Judgment Day! On this day as the Perfect Judge, *“He shall be the judge of both the quick and the dead,”* that is, of both those who will be found alive when He comes and those who have died and been buried. The point is, no one will escape judgment on this great Judgment Day!

How long will it last? Who can say? The Bible says in 2 Peter 3:8 that *“with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one*

\* Works, Volume V, p. 173.

NOTES

day.” Some interpreters, having attempted to link this 1,000 years with the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation chapter 20, concluded that the Final Judgment will last for a thousand years. There are now more than two billion people on the earth — “the quick” who are alive — and who knows how many dead! Considering time from a human viewpoint, a thousand years may not even be long enough. God does not count time as we do, and He alone knows.

Where shall be the place of Judgment? Many think it will be here on this earth, but in 1 Thessalonians Paul writes:

*“The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”  
(1 Th 4:16b).*

Likewise, in our scripture Jesus makes a point of the fact that on that day there will be two people going about the same job or in the same house, and *“one will be taken and the other left”* (Lk 17:34-35). It seems most probable that the Great White Throne will be highly exalted above the earth.

What shall happen during Judgment and how shall we be judged? The Bible says the Judgment will be a time of accounting for all of us! It says that every person shall be called to accountability! Hear the Word of God in the 14th chapter of Romans:

*“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God ... so each of us shall give an account of himself to God” (Rom 14:10b and 12).*

Again and again in the Gospels, Jesus tells us the exact nature of this accounting. He reserves for that very special place in this *Journey Into Discipleship*, the very last lesson — Lesson #50 in Luke 19:11-27, which is the Parable of the Pounds — a final emphasis upon this very point: the exact nature of this accounting. He does everything possible to let us know without any doubt how He calls us to accountability. That accounting, He says, shall be an accounting of our stewardship for Him while we are upon this earth! Why? Because this is absolutely the only way to know for sure if a person has been faithful. An accounting of our stewardship is the only way to reveal whether we are genuinely sincere or just “taking the Lord’s name in vain” when we profess faith in Him. Of course, faith is the only way we can receive our Lord’s grace and spend eternity with Him; but obedience to His command to be faithful stewards is the only test of that faith! On the great Judgment Day our Lord will call us to give a complete accounting of our stewardship of the life with which He has entrusted us. An accounting of our stewardship shows if we have truly accepted forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus on the Cross. What we do with our life tells that much better than words ever can. An accounting of our stewardship shows if we have honestly accepted the offer of His righteousness and His love as our own righteousness and our own love by

permitting Him to pour His righteousness and love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which He gives us!

The Bible is clear that at the time of this accounting *“the joyful verdict of acquittal will be pronounced upon those on the right hand, and the dreadful sentence of condemnation upon those on the left — both of which must remain as fixed and as immutable as the throne of God.”\**

### III. The circumstances following the Judgment

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What circumstances will follow the Final Judgment? The Bible answers this clearly and concisely! Three things will happen.

1. The sentence pronounced upon the faithful and the unfaithful stewards shall be immediately executed! The Bible says,

*“And they [the unfaithful] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt 25:46).*

Note that the same adjective is used to describe both the punishment and the reward: the word “eternal” — everlasting. Both the condemnation and the reward last forever! There is no more pardon, parole, or grace, for the Final Judgment is “The Day of the Lord” when eternal justice is meted out. Those who are “faithful stewards enter into the joy of the Lord” with eternal rest! Those who are “unfaithful stewards,” says the Bible, “have no rest day or night” because they enter into “eternal torment” and “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever” (Rev 14:11).

2. Following Judgment Day the earth and the firmament will be totally dissolved and destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:5-12). All material things will vanish and pass away, like sand dissolved into glass by fire. Perhaps this is what the Bible means when in Revelation 4:6 we are told that *“before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal.”* Of course, only God knows.
3. Following the great Judgment Day, the Bible says that according to God’s promise there shall be a new heaven and a new earth for the righteous and the faithful. There,

*“God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain” (Rev 7:17 and 21:4).*

In this new heaven and new earth there shall be perfect love, joy and peace. And finally:

*“There shall be no night there; and they shall need no candle, neither the light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 21:25 and 22:5).*

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\* Works, Volume V, p. 178.

#### **IV. Practical considerations about the Judgment**

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The meaning is two-fold: first a warning, and second, an opportunity. First, it warns us that we had better begin to face up to genuine accountability in this life if we are going to be ready for “The Great Assize” — the great Final Judgment! If we defiantly and continuously refuse to keep our sacred covenants and vows in this life — with our husband or wife, with our Lord and His Church, with our fellow men — there can be only one place for us on that great Day of Judgment, and that is on our Lord’s left: the place of eternal torment!

This also gives us a great opportunity. This is the Gospel — the good news! Jesus came to this earth to offer you and me and every person the opportunity to be ready on that great Judgment Day — the opportunity to be forgiven of our unfaithfulness through repentance, and through faith to begin a new life of accountability!

When John Wesley reaches this moving climax in his famous sermon on *The Great Assize* you can feel the urgency of it as he begins to end almost every sentence with an exclamation point or a question mark, and the spiritual intensity continues to mount to the point where only the most hardened unbeliever could turn his back on this opportunity to share in the amazing grace of God in Christ forever and ever.

I want to close today by quoting verbatim — 18th century English and all — these final words from Wesley’s great sermon. Hear it as if he were preaching it to you today as he preached it during the session of the Assizes on March 10, 1758.

*“O, who can stand before the face of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ!*

*See! See! He cometh! He maketh the clouds his chariots! He rideth upon the wings of the wind. A devouring fire goeth before him, and after him a flame burneth! See! He sitteth upon his throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour! Behold, his eyes are as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters!*

*“How will ye escape? Will ye call to the mountains to fall on you, the rocks to cover you? Alas, the mountains themselves, the rocks, the earth, the heavens, are just ready to flee away! Can ye prevent the sentence? Wherewith? With all the substance of thy house, with your thousands of gold and silver? Blind wretch! Thou camest naked from thy mother’s womb, and more naked into eternity ...*

*“Why should one of you be found on the left hand at his appearing? He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; by repentance, to faith in a bleeding Lord; by faith, to spotless love, to the full image of God renewed in the heart, and producing all holiness of conversation. Can you doubt of this, when*

*you remember, the Judge of all is likewise the Saviour of all? Hath he not bought you with his own blood, that ye might not perish, but have everlasting life? O make proof of his mercy, rather than his justice; of his love, rather than the thunder of his power! He is not far from every one of us; and he is now come, not to condemn, but to save the world. He standeth in the midst! Sinner, doth he not now, even now, knock at the door of thy heart? O that thou mayest know, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! Oh, that ye may now give yourselves to him who gave himself for you, in humble faith, in holy, active, patient love! So shall ye rejoice with exceeding joy in his day, when he cometh in the clouds of heaven!"\**

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### **Discipleship Lesson #42**

**A disciple must be accountable and ready for Judgment Day.**

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\* Works, Volume V, pp. 183-185.

## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #42?
2. Name and explain the four points of Wesley's famous sermon, "The Great Assize."

## Search the Scriptures

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3. According to the following scriptures, what is the true test of our profession of faith?

John 14:15, 23

2 Cor 5:15

1 John 2:3-5

1 John 5:3

## Internalize God's Word

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4. As seen in the Bible, God sends warnings of impending judgment and gives a call to repentance before His Judgment comes upon His people. Ask God the following question: "Are there areas of my life where You are calling me to accountability?"

Listen. Wait. Watch. God's answer may come immediately or gradually. It may come through prayer, Scripture, in a dream, through a friend, through circumstances and events — good or bad, through an inner impression, during worship, through a sermon or a book. Write out God's answer to your question as it comes to you:

Determine how you are going to respond. Write it down:

Test God's answer and your response in counsel with a trusted Christian friend.

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**Memory scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:15**

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## Sermon 43: Pray and Don't Lose Heart

In only two of His more than fifty parables does Jesus tell us the point before He tells the parable. These two parables are the basis of the next two discipleship lessons in our *Journey Into Discipleship*. Lesson #43, found in Luke 18:1-8, is based on *The Parable of the Importunate Widow*, sometimes called *The Parable of the Unjust Judge*. Jesus begins chapter 18 of Luke like this:

*“And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Lk 18:1).*

Jesus told this parable so that His disciples would have His divine remedy for the deadly disease of “losing heart.” This is our 43rd discipleship lesson.

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### **Discipleship Lesson #43**

**Persistent prayer keeps a disciple from losing heart and falling away.**

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Why do we get lax about our Christian commitment and fall short of our call to discipleship? It's because, for one reason or another, we lose heart. We lose our “first love” and the excitement and motivation that goes with it. Why do we lose heart? Because things don't go the way we think they should go. What causes us to lose heart? Any one of a number things:

1. We simply let something else steal our heart away and crowd out Christ.
2. We become disillusioned, because we try and nothing happens.
3. We are turned off by other Christians who are different from us or who hurt our feelings.
4. We are not recognized for what we do.
5. We get caught in a web of immorality and our guilt keeps us from Christ.
6. We permit a “root of bitterness” and resentment to eat away our faith and our relationship with God.
7. We intellectually cannot swallow what we are being fed.
8. We make our feelings ultimate instead of faith, and we don't “feel” like we would like to feel.
9. A member of our family or a close friend is becoming a religious fanatic, and we go the other way to balance things out.
10. We say, “We had too much religion when we were children.” It was “pushed” on us then and now we “push” ourselves the other way.

Scripture

Luke 18:1-8

Text

And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

*Luke 18:1*

Well, there you have ten causes for losing heart and there are many more. Did you notice the common denominator in all of them? It's this: we lose heart because — for one reason or another — our relationship with our living Lord is broken! Jesus says there is only one way to prevent this and that way is persistence in prayer. Our text says, "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." Then Jesus tells the parable. He says that there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man, but a widow kept coming to him seeking justice. His answer was continually "No!" but she wouldn't accept that answer, and persistently kept going back to the judge. Finally, the judge says:

*"Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming" (Lk 18:4-5).*

*Then Jesus concludes with this:*

*"Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk 18:6-8).*

Jesus ties this lesson into our last discipleship lesson about the Son of Man coming again and the Final Judgment, saying in effect:

*"How strange that I will find no faith in My own people when I return," He says, "when even a poor helpless widow has the persistence and the faith to stay in there and not lose heart even when the judge is godless and crooked! Look around you; you see that happen every day. She is persistent even when the odds are against her being heard and receiving mercy and justice. Because she stays in there and won't give up, she is rewarded. Yet, as Christians, when the odds are all in your favor, you let the slightest little thing turn you away. Oh foolish man and woman," Jesus is saying, "what else can I do? I've revealed to you a God of love, a God of mercy, a God of power, a God who cares more than your own earthly father, and knows you so much better. He even knows every hair on your head and is more eager than an earthly father to meet your every need. Can't you see why you're like you are — up and down, lukewarm -- and why I'll find no faith in you when I return? It's because you've lost heart and fallen away! Hear me one more time! It's the last time I'll tell you before I go back to our Father. Hear it and hear it well, for it's absolutely the only remedy for your deadly disease of losing heart. I've told you and I've shown you in My own life dozens of times and still you are just lukewarm! Here is this important discipleship lesson one final time: persistent prayer alone can keep a disciple from losing heart and falling away. Therefore, pray always so you will not lose heart!"*

This is our Lord's lesson for us today. Now, what does it mean? Why is persistent prayer our only assurance for keeping the faith, for staying in there and not losing heart? The Bible gives us four reasons.

### **I. Persistent prayer keeps our communication lines open with God**

Notice that in our parable the important thing about the widow is she will not permit the communication lines to be shut down. Even though the judge is godless and heartless, she knows there is still hope even on a human level as long as there is communication. When communication stops, the relationship and hope are permanently broken.

How much truer this is with us and God! Because God is love, He wants to bless us; but He cannot! Why? Because through our failure to pray persistently, we've shut down the communication lines and broken our relationship with God. In our self-centeredness and ignorance we blame God, instead of ourselves, for our prayers not being answered. In truth it is because we have failed to discipline ourselves persistently — daily — to keep our communication lines open with God, and thus keep our relationship with Him growing and maturing. Persistent prayer is absolutely the only way this can be done, says our Lord.

Let's look at this truth through a human illustration. When God created us He gave us a circulatory system to supply our bodies with the necessary nourishment for life and to get rid of the impurities that destroy life. Likewise, when God set us in families and bound us together with love, He provided us with a similar circulatory system and for the exact same reason. This circulatory system we call communication. Just as our body is dependent upon our circulation system for health and life, so is our marriage and family relationship dependent upon its circulation system. When the blood stops flowing in our bodies we die! Likewise, when communication stops flowing in a family, love dies! When a husband and wife stop communicating their love verbally, emotionally and sexually they begin to lose heart and fall away from each other. Soon the love dies, and another marriage is dead and buried.

God has not left us desolate! God has not provided for our physical bodies and our families with a dependable circulatory system and neglected the most important of all — our spiritual lives — that part of us which is eternal. No, God has given us a circulatory system of the spirit as well as of the body. God has provided for communication between us and our Heavenly Father, and that circulatory system is prayer! Just as the blood must continuously flow through our bodies and the love must continuously flow in a family to maintain personal and family health, so must we learn to pray persistently in order to remain healthy spiritually! You can no more go to God only when you have a special need and maintain intimate communication, than you can use your heart only when you want to run

around the block. First, persistent prayer keeps us from losing heart because it keeps our communication lines open with God.

## **II. Persistent prayer recognizes our need for God**

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To come to church on Sunday and acknowledge God as the Creator and the Ruler of all, the Sustainer of life and the Giver of all good things, and then fail to seek out this living, all-powerful, all-loving God daily in prayer is to openly and defiantly deny that you need God. In fact, it's using our Lord's name in vain to stand up in church on Sunday morning and repeat one of the great creeds such as The Apostle's Creed and then neglect to go to prayer regularly and persistently, day-in-and-day-out! To think that we can perfunctorily throw a brief prayer up to God when we run into a specific need in our life and have it answered, without daily, persistently, and regularly recognizing our need for God through prayer, is the height of ignorance and blasphemy.

This last Thursday a man traveled over a thousand miles so my wife and I could minister Counseling Prayer to him. He had lost heart. He had lost heart in himself. He had lost heart in his marriage. He had lost heart in God's ability to deal with his complicated and urgent problems which made death look like the only answer. I told him not to worry about his own faith at that moment, for my wife and I would have the faith for him. We spent over ten hours with him "praying unceasingly." Like the widow in our parable, we refused to accept the answer of "No" which this man kept giving to God and to us. Then after seven hours of "persistent prayer" — at 3 o'clock in the morning -- there came an exciting breakthrough! This man found the "Pearl of Great Price." He opened the "Treasure in the Field." He drank the bubbling "New Wine!" We laughed. We cried. We rejoiced with him.

The point is not that God answered our persistent prayer for this man. We never had any doubt about that! We knew God would do that as soon as this man turned and opened up his life to God. Here's the point: the only way this man can keep the new treasure he has found is through persistent prayer! Without daily, regular, persistent prayer on his part now, where he recognizes his pressing, desperate and absolute need for God, he will soon lose heart again and fall away and our ten hours will have been in vain. Only through persistent prayer do we truly recognize and confess our constant need for God.

## **III. Persistent prayer opens our lives to God's blessings**

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We Methodists often speak of the "Means of Grace," that is, those means which God uses to bless us with His grace. Following the scriptures and the leadership of John Wesley, we usually list the primary means of grace as: prayer, worship, the Bible, the sacraments and Christian fellowship. I wonder if we haven't made a great mistake in breaking them down like

that, just as some say we've made a mistake by listing nine "fruit of the Spirit" since the singular word "fruit" is used in the Bible. "The fruit of the Spirit," they say on good authority, "is really love; and the other eight — joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control — are simply descriptive of the way this 'fruit of love' operates in our lives!"

In the same way, I wonder if Jesus is not telling us here that the only real means of grace that can keep us from losing heart and falling away is persistent prayer — prayer without ceasing — and these other four things are simply descriptive of the way God uses persistent prayer to bless us! Think about a Sunday morning worship service and you will see what I mean. What do we do here?

First we fellowship with one another as Christian brothers and sisters.

Then, we praise God through song and worship.

We also pray corporately.

We give our offering to God.

We read God's Word.

We proclaim God's Word.

We respond to God's Word.

Finally we come to our Lord's table for Holy Communion with Him.

In fact, we use all of the primary means of grace every Sunday. The truth of the matter is, all of them become nothing but "religious paraphernalia" unless one thing is present in each one, and that one thing is persistent prayer! Persistent prayer is the one thing that gives meaning to all the others. By persistent prayer I mean constantly keeping our communication lines open with God during all the time we worship, constantly recognizing our need for God, and constantly opening up our lives to God's blessings as we worship!

Yes, when Jesus says, "You must always pray so you won't lose heart and fall away," He is telling us that the real means of grace is persistent prayer and the other things we do here on Sunday morning and during the rest of the week are simply descriptive of how God works through persistent prayer to bless us!

#### **IV. Persistent prayer is the doorway into a living faith and an exciting, dynamic, joyful way of life**

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Jesus is saying to all of us today:

*If you are not experiencing miracles and the healing love of God in your own life and in the lives of your loved ones and friends, then you had better go into your closet and examine your prayer life; for persistent*

*prayer is the only way these things can happen!*

*If you are not receiving in worship each week the truth and strength you need to be victorious over life's problems and tragedies, then ask yourself and answer honestly the question: 'How persistent am I in prayer when I worship?' For persistent prayer is what gives life to God's Word in us and enables God to empower us with His Holy Spirit.*

*If indifference, alienation and resentment are replacing love in your home and in your marriage and you are losing heart about your mate or child or parent, then time is of the essence and you must turn to God in persistent prayer or you shall lose your most precious relationships in life!*

*If your work is dull, draining and unproductive, then you've lost your sense of being a co-worker with God, and the only way you can ever regain it is through persistent prayer!*

Are you unable to find the knowledge and the wisdom and the answers for your problems and the love for your relationships? You know the answer, for Jesus says there is only one answer and that answer is persistent prayer. According to Jesus, God's Living Word to us, if you have lost heart and have fallen away for any reason, the answer for rediscovering that "Pearl of Great Price," that "Treasure in the Field," that "New Wine" is persistent prayer! This is our Lord's 43rd discipleship lesson for all of us today. "Let him who has ears to hear — hear!"

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### **Discipleship Lesson #43**

**Persistent prayer keeps a disciple from losing heart and falling away.**

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## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #43?
2. There are many reasons why people lose heart. What is the one root cause for each of these reasons?
3. List the four reasons mentioned in our sermon why persistent prayer is our only assurance for keeping the faith and not losing heart.

## Search the Scriptures

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4. God has provided us a means of communication with Him through prayer. Write out what you learn from the following scriptures concerning prayer.

Jer 33:3

Is 55:6

Mt 7:7-8

5. One of the reasons for the effectiveness of the early church was their persistence in prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42). What were some of the occasions for their prayer?

Acts 1:24

Acts 4:31

Acts 12:5

Acts 13:3

Acts 28:8

## Internalize God's Word

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6. Meditate on Psalm 63:1-5. Do not ask God for anything. Just "be" in His presence. You may want to use *Steps in Praying God's Word* in the Appendix.

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**Memory scripture: Jeremiah 33:3**

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## Notes

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## Sermon 44: The Eyes of a Disciple

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says:

*“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Mt 6:22-23).*

By this, Jesus means that how we see things determines how we actually live life. It’s easy to see this truth in our relationships, for we all know that how we see other people really determines how we relate to them. The same is true with God. How we see God actually determines how we relate to God. It’s just as true about ourselves. How we see ourselves, determines what we really think of ourselves.

Now transfer this truth to the situation of our Scripture lesson, Luke 18:9-14, commonly called *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican*. Here Jesus chooses the context of prayer to teach us one of the greatest truths in life, for prayer illuminates our inner life, and probably better than anything else shows us how we truly see ourselves, how we truly see others, and how we truly see God.

In this parable, Jesus says there are basically two ways to see ourselves, others and God. He shows us these two ways through two men who are praying in the temple. One of these men is a Pharisee; that is, he is a very religious person who has separated himself from the world in order to live a religious life. The other man, a tax collector, is heavily involved in the affairs of the world, and because of this, he is despised by the religious authorities of his day. Jesus says:

*“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get’” (Lk 18:11-12).*

Jesus goes on to tell us about the tax collector:

*“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (Lk 18:13).*

Jesus then tells us that only the tax collector shall be justified, and concludes with this penetrating statement:

*“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 18:14).*

Here, Jesus is revealing to us the kind of eyes we must have in order to be

Scripture

Luke 18:9-14

Text

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is not sound your whole body will be full of darkness.  
*Matthew 6:22-23*

I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.  
*Luke 18:14*

His disciples, and He is doing it by revealing to us both the right and the wrong way to see ourselves, others, and God.

## I. The wrong way to see . . .

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### Ourselves

First, Jesus shows us how the Pharisee sees himself. Two words in this parable tell us more than a book could tell about the Pharisee's opinion of himself. Jesus says, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus," and then He adds these two words: "with himself." He prayed *with himself!* In other words, the Pharisee directed his prayer to himself, rather than to God. What a picturesque way to show us the granddaddy of all sin: to put ourselves in the place that is reserved for God alone! Nothing reveals this sin better than a look at our attitude when we pray. How easy it is to fall into the habit of praying simply to hear ourselves pray. We pray at the drop of a hat, because we just love to put ourselves in the spotlight. We like to hear the pat and pious phrases we have adopted when we pray. No one is tempted more "to pray thus" as Jesus says, than a minister during the pastoral prayer on Sunday morning. Any person who leads a congregation or any group in prayer is tempted to be more concerned about what he says and how it sounds than anything else. This, I think, is why Jesus uses the context of public prayer — prayer in the temple — to reveal to us this granddaddy of all sin.

What we are dealing with here is the basic sin — the sin of Adam and Eve, the cause for "the fall" — the attempt to become all-knowing like God! Like the Pharisee in our parable, Adam and Eve also pushed God off of the throne of their lives and put themselves there!

All of us are tempted in the exact same way, aren't we? Constantly we search for ways to impress others about ourselves. All of us are a lot like the woman applying for a job and instead of enclosing a picture of herself as the application called for, she wrote on the application: "I don't have a recent picture of myself, but I'm enclosing a recent one of my high school daughter, because we look so much alike." We all have some of the Pharisee in us when it comes to looking at ourselves, don't we? Bruce Barton says that "conceit is the devil's gift to little men." It saps all that is good and noble in us. There always comes a time when "the self-made man" realizes that he needs to call in someone else to help finish the job!

Jesus is telling us here that an exalted opinion of ourselves is the beginning of destroying all of life's relationships. Ogden Nash put it this way in a wise bit of verse:

To keep your marriage brimming,  
With love in the loving cup,  
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;  
Whenever you're right, shut up!

## Others

Jesus also shows us how the Pharisee sees others. He sees others with a critical and judgmental eye. What Jesus wants us to see here is that anytime we put our trust in an exalted opinion of ourselves that it will inevitably result in criticizing and judging others. Why? That's simple, and Jesus illustrates it for us here, because any time we exalt ourselves we must keep ourselves built up by tearing other people down! We can't bear to think others as good or as moral or as religious as we are, for this would undermine our exalted opinion of ourselves. Therefore, we must continually find fault in other people, especially those who attempt to do the same thing we do, in order to point up our own superiority. This is why the most difficult audience to speak to or preach to is always your peers in your own profession.

When we see others as an opportunity to build up ourselves, then it follows that our whole approach to life soon becomes critical and judgmental, instead of loving and supportive of others. We become like the husband who always found fault with what his wife did. She was determined to please him just once before she died. One Saturday morning she told him to stay in bed and she would bring him his breakfast in bed. Anything he wanted. He ordered toast, coffee, bacon, and two eggs, one over easy and the other one scrambled. Soon, his wife brought his breakfast tray with a big red rose on it, which everyone knows says, "I love you!" The husband was terribly upset and displeased. As always, she had done it all wrong. Perplexed, she asked, "Dear, what is the matter? What have I done wrong?" "I'll tell you what's the matter," the husband snapped. "I'll tell you what you've done wrong: you've scrambled the wrong egg!" Any time we exalt ourselves before long our whole approach to life is critical and judgmental; we continually build ourselves up by tearing others down.

## God

Next, Jesus shows us how this Pharisee sees God. This is the ugliest picture of all, for he sees God through the same judgmental eyes with which he sees others and for the exact same reason: in order to build up his own ego. To him, God is a heartless lawgiver who judges His people by how they keep the religious law. Of course with this vision of God the Pharisee can really build himself up, for he devoutly keeps the law of fasting, tithing and the law of Sabbath. In other words, instead of trusting God because he sees God as Jesus reveals Him to be — as a God who loves us and will go to any length to redeem us — this Pharisee really trusts himself to live a life of law because he sees God as a heartless lawgiver.

In this Pharisee, Jesus shows us the wrong way to see ourselves, the wrong way to see others, and the wrong way to see God. In him, Jesus shows us what an unsound eye will do to us; it will literally destroy all of our relationships in life. It will make us hard and judgmental. It will turn our

eyes on ourselves instead of on the good news of God and His kingdom. It will force us to depend upon ourselves for our justification, and send us straight to hell; for no man can keep the Law, “no, not one!”

Now, let’s look at the picture that Jesus paints of the other man — the tax collector — where Jesus shows us the eyes of a disciple, that is, how we must see ourselves, others and God if we are to be His disciples.

This parable must have been terribly shocking to the people listening to Jesus, for to them the Pharisee was the epitome of goodness and the tax collector was the epitome of evil and worldliness. Jesus completely reverses this thinking and makes the tax collector the example of goodness, and the Pharisee the example of evil. What is there about this tax collector that causes Jesus to point to him as an example for us? It’s one just thing: it’s his eyes! It’s the way he sees himself and others, and the way he sees God. Jesus says this tax collector has “the eyes of a disciple!” Let’s examine those eyes now.

## **II. The right way to see . . .**

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### **Ourselves**

First, let’s examine the way he sees himself. Jesus commends this tax collector because he sees himself as he really is. He is honest with himself, which is, perhaps, the hardest thing for all of us to do. According to our Lord, this is the place we all must always begin if we are to be His disciples and build the right kind of life: we must see ourselves honestly!

A frustrated psychiatrist finally said to his obnoxious patient: “Have you ever thought of this possibility: maybe you don’t have a complex at all; maybe you really are inferior!” This tax collector was able to see himself, warts and all. He was able to see that he really was a sinner. That is, he was able to see that he really did put himself and other things above his relationship with Almighty God, and this caused both him and others pain and anguish. The Bible says that God can do absolutely nothing for us until we are able to see this — until, like this tax collector, we can truly say, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!”

The sad fact is that many of us who sincerely want to do the right thing, actually train our children to be more like the Pharisee in our parable than like the tax collector. Dr. Howard Lane, a college professor, made a study of classroom cheating in a Midwestern community. Dr. Lane let the students grade their own papers, checking later to see how many answers had been changed. A group of children from well-to-do middle-class homes, shockingly enough, were proved to have cheated far more than a group of reform-school kids. Because, Dr. Lane says, while honesty was given lip service, success was really the main goal in life. The children had seen their parents tell lies to promote their own interests, give flattering welcomes to people they didn’t like, and do whatever was necessary to get

ahead. Under such circumstances honesty simply didn't have value with the children, no matter how much the parents talked about it.

One of the most moving statements about honesty that I have heard came from one of the main participants in the Watergate scandal who went on to confess his sins and be born again. Chuck Colson, who spoke at our Missions Conference last year, said this:

“What a shame it is that our lives must be wrecked before we realize that truth is the only thing with which a person can really live.”

This is exactly what Jesus is telling us in this parable, and, furthermore, He is showing us that to live by truth we must begin by being honest with ourselves! Here is the first characteristic of the eyes of a disciple — what Jesus calls in the Sermon on the Mount “a sound eye;” and this is the first of three parts to our 44th discipleship lesson.

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### **Discipleship Lesson #44, Part One:**

**To have the eyes of a disciple, we must begin by seeing ourselves as we really are. We must be honest with ourselves!**

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#### **Others**

Now, let's examine how this tax collector sees others. In this parable, Jesus shows us that the tax collector judges no one but himself. He doesn't try to build himself up by blaming others, like the Pharisee. He judges no man but himself. Jesus is showing us that the eyes of a disciple will always see the best in others.

One little boy telephoned his little friend, who had the same first name as his father. They both were named Harry. When his mother answered the phone, the little boy asked, “May I speak to Harry, please?”

The mother asked, “Do you want big Harry or little Harry?” The little boy thought a moment, then said, “Big Harry, I guess; I mean the one in the fourth grade.” He saw his friend with the eyes of a disciple.

We often quote Will Rogers' famous saying, “I never met a man I didn't like.” Have you ever stopped to think that even a more amazing statement all of us could make about Will Rogers is: “This is exactly why we have never met a person who didn't like Will Rogers!” As I think back on my ministerial career, I believe I have heard fewer confessions about breaking the ninth commandment than any other: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Yet, this is the very one which most people break the most often! We don't admit it; we think we are right, for we actually see others that way.

I have on my desk at home a piece of stone about the size of my fist, which my oldest son gave me when he was a little boy. He saw it out in the field, and thought it would be a good present for Dad. As he held it out to me, I

was reminded of something our Lord said about a stone. I printed on that stone in red ink, five big letters followed by an exclamation point, and those letters are: F I R S T! I keep it right in front of me on my desk. Each time I look at it I am reminded of our Lord's words to the religious people of His day when they began to judge the woman caught in adultery: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone!" Try it! It will help you see others through the eyes of a disciple instead of through judgmental and critical eyes.

Another thing which will help us stop judging and criticizing others is to remember what our Lord says about our words having eternal significance, and that how when all of the facts are uncovered that we are the one who is judged instead of the one we condemn. I heard a story this past week that points up the danger of making snap judgments of others and how impossible it is to ever rectify such judgments completely.

A business man was called out of town on a trip, but his plane was late; so, he decided to call home and talk to his wife. The maid answered the phone, and when he asked to speak to the lady of the house, the maid said, "Oh, sir, she's upstairs with her man."

He was so furious he asked the maid, "Do you know where I keep my gun?" When she said she did, he ordered her to go get it, shoot both his wife and the other man, and then report back to him. The maid put the phone down, and soon he heard two shots: bang! bang! When the maid came back on the phone he told her to take the gun and bury it in a swimming pool. She was flustered and replied, "But, sir, we don't have a swimming pool!" The man gulped and asked: "Is this 742-12--?" Our judgments of others have eternal significance!

The second characteristic of the eyes of a disciple is this:

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### **Discipleship Lesson #44, Part Two:**

**To have the eyes of a disciple, we must see the best in others!**

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#### **God**

Finally, Jesus shows us how this tax collector sees God. The tax collector sees God as a merciful, loving heavenly Father, just exactly as Jesus reveals Him to be. Here, is the real difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee trusted himself to be good. The tax collector trusted the goodness of God and the promises of God's Word. This brings us to the third and final part of our discipleship lesson.

Because of the way the Pharisee saw God, he bound himself to a life of law, which doomed him to disappointment, guilt and ultimately hell. Because of the way the tax collector saw God, he opened up himself to a life of grace, and thus to forgiveness and salvation and to eternity with His Lord.

So, the third characteristic of the eyes of a disciple is this:

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**Discipleship Lesson #44, Part Three:**

**To have the eyes of a disciple, we must always see God as a God of grace,  
instead of a God of law.**

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A. J. Cronin, the novelist, tells about a trip he made to Rome. While sightseeing he lost his way and ended up in a deserted street standing before a small square building of gray stone. Without thinking he walked inside, and saw a small plaque set into the worn stone floor. Reading it, suddenly he realized he was standing in the famous chapel of “Quo Vadis.” The Apostle Peter, in fear of the emperor Nero, was fleeing Rome to save his own skin. It was on this very spot, according to legend, that Peter came face-to-face with his Risen Lord, and heard Jesus say to him: “Quo Vadis? Whither goest thou?” This turned Peter around and helped him to see everything — himself, others and his Lord — through the eyes of a disciple.

A. J. Cronin says that as he stood there on this hallowed spot, he was sure he heard those same words all over again from his Lord: “Quo Vadis? Whither goest thou?” In that moment like Peter, he saw how he had been putting his trust in the wrong things and it turned his life around, too! I wonder if that’s not what we need to hear our Lord say to us today? “Quo Vadis?” Whither goest thou? If we’ll stop playing the Pharisee — trying to save ourselves — long enough to come face-to-face with our Lord Jesus Christ, He will enable us to see with His eyes. Then we can see ourselves honestly, we can see the best in others, and we can see God as Jesus reveals Him to us, as a God of love and grace instead of a hardhearted God of law. The good news is Jesus wants to give us His eyes, so we can see rightly when we look at ourselves, at others and at God.

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**Discipleship Lesson #44**

**To have the eyes of a disciple, we must see ourselves honestly; we must see the best in others; we must see God as a God of grace. We must see with the eyes of Jesus.**

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## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #44?
2. How would you compare the attitude of the Pharisee to that of the tax-collector?

## Search the Scriptures

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3. According to the following scriptures, how are we to look at ourselves, others and God?

1 Cor 15:10a

Rom 12:3

Rom 12:10

Rom 2:1

Rom 11:33-36

## Internalize God's Word

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4. Use The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9-14 as the basis for personal meditation. See *Steps in Praying God's Word* in the Appendix. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you yourself in this parable. How have you been looking at yourself, at others, at God? Make note of your insights.

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**Memory scripture: Romans 11:33-36**

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## Sermon 45: Discipleship Is Childlikeness

As with most of our Lord's teachings, the one about discipleship and childlikeness grows out of an actual happening which He uses to drive home an eternal truth. It was the custom for Jewish mothers to bring their children to a distinguished rabbi to be blessed by him on their first birthday. As mothers were bringing their infants to Jesus that He might touch and bless them, the disciples tried to stop them so that Jesus could get about more important business. Then, the Bible tells us this in Luke 18:16 and 17:

*"But Jesus called them to him, saying, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'"*

What does Jesus mean when He says that to enter God's Kingdom we must come like a child? To understand it, first we must remember that the theme of everything that Jesus said and did was the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the Pearl of Great Price, the Treasure hidden in a field. It is the ultimate good in this life and in the world to come. It is the one thing every person should seek first of all and above all! To Jesus everything in the Christian life hinges upon our receiving and entering into the Kingdom of God. What we are dealing with here is not just some bit of advice for making life more enjoyable or nicer; we are dealing with the basic eternal truth about life itself!

Reduced to its simplest meaning, when Jesus uses the term the Kingdom of God He means above everything else the reign or the rule of God in our lives. From a practical standpoint Jesus is saying, "Before we can receive the privileges and blessings God has for us — both now and eternally — we must take out citizenship in God's Kingdom, just as we must become American citizens in order to receive the privileges and blessings of American citizenship." Jesus goes on to say, "The way to become Kingdom citizens and receive its privileges and blessings is through childlikeness — we must come like a little child." To understand this we need to remember that Jesus is using infants — children who have only reached their first birthday — as His object lesson here, not school-age children. He's using children brought by their mothers to Him, still held in their mother's arms — children who are still totally dependent upon their mothers. What Jesus was asking His disciples to do and what He's asking us to do is this: to see the Kingdom of God the way these little infant children see life, for only in that way can we grasp the real meaning of it and begin to experience it.

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### Scripture

Luke 18:15-17

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### Text

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

*Luke 18:17*

## NOTES

This past week as we have kept our little grandson Bill, who will soon be a year old, I've done my best to see life through his little eyes, and it has brought me into a much more meaningful and deeper understanding of what Jesus is actually telling us here. Through the eyes of Little Bill I've gotten a better grasp of what Jesus means by such important Christian words and concepts as grace, trust, salvation, repentance, faith, obedience, guidance, love, forgiveness, Christian growth and sanctification.

I am confident this is exactly what Jesus means when He tells us to come to Him like a little child. He means to discard our pre-conceived ideas and see for the first time the newness of life and new creation offered to us in the gospel. To help us do this today, I'm going to let you share some of my experiences with Little Bill and see this great, big, beautiful world through his little eyes — like a little child.

### **I. Grace**

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Grace is the most important word in the Bible, but at the same time the least understood. Why? Because we look at it like a grown-up instead of like a little child. We try to understand it like a lawyer, doctor, engineer, or college professor; and our minds are simply not big enough for that. Jesus says there is only one way any person can grasp the meaning of grace and actually experience the grace of God — and that one way is like a little child!

An engineer thinks he has to build the Kingdom of God. A doctor thinks he has to dissect it. A lawyer thinks he has to brief it logically. A college professor thinks he has to explain it. But, dear friends, we do not build the Kingdom of God, because it is already here. It has been built from the foundation of the earth complete without blemish or anything lacking. God in His grace has seen fit to reveal it to us in all of its glory through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Neither can the Kingdom of God be dissected, because it is a spiritual kingdom within us and among us that has no dissectible parts. Neither can it be briefed or explained logically, for the mind of man can neither see nor understand the great mysteries and glories of God.

My mind pondered all these truths as I watched Little Bill excitedly exploring the great, big, beautiful world around him. Everything he touched was a new experience to be explored and lived out to the fullest. Everything he surveyed belonged to him, it was his and he accepted it without question. I looked at him and said to myself, "Why, you little squirt, how dare you be so sure of these things I've bought and paid for with my own blood, sweat, and tears!"

He looked up at me and smiled that knowing grin of his as if to say, "Why, you silly Old Granddaddy, haven't you ever heard of the word 'grace!' Stop knocking it and get down here and live it up with me! The trouble with

you, Granddaddy, is that all of that schooling has gone to your head, and grace is an experience of the heart! That's the trouble with you grown-ups: too much head and not enough heart! Do you want to know what 'grace' is? Then begin seeing life like I see it — like a little child. Everything I have has been given to me — even life itself. I didn't earn any of it, but oh, how do I enjoy it!"

Then that grin spread all across his little cherub face and I knew exactly what he wanted to tell me. He was simply saying, "Granddaddy, you've got problems — big problems! God wants to give new life to you too. Your problem is that you think of this 'new life' like a grown-up instead of experiencing it like a little child. Come on down here with me, Granddaddy, and I'll show you how to experience the amazing grace of God." And, he did too!

## II. Trust

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If grace is the most important but least understood word in the Bible, then trust is the most dynamic word in the Bible and the least practiced -- for trust is letting go of doing it yourself and letting God! Trust is total dependence upon God with the assurance that underneath are His everlasting arms. Trust is not only the most dynamic word in the Bible, it is also the most inclusive word in the Bible, for without it there can never be repentance or faith or obedience or guidance or salvation itself. Trust is the catalyst for everything else in the Christian life. Trust is the way that God's grace actually operates in us and through us. Trust is the most dynamic word in the Bible but the least practiced. Why? Because, Jesus says, we look at it like a grown-up instead of like a little child.

Perhaps the one trait that stands out most about a little child is trust. A little one-year-old child trusts his parents, that is, he is totally dependent upon them to meet all of his needs. He trusts his mother to feed him when he's hungry, to change him when he needs changing, to care for him when he's sick, to rock him when he's sleepy. A little child begins with trust and as a by-product of this trust he discovers all the other meaningful experiences in life.

Let me illustrate. The other day I was taking care of Little Bill, and I sat him down on the floor in the bathroom doorway to watch me shave. Now Little Bill is a "wire boy," that is, you sit him on the floor and he immediately goes for all of the electric wires in sight. He loves wires. He simply can't resist wires. You might say that he is a "wire addict." Wires really turn him on. And, sure enough, as soon as I sat him down he spotted a wire and went for it. I chastised him a few times and thought he had learned his lesson; but before long he had moved out of the doorway, out of my sight and slipped behind the TV on the other side so I couldn't see him. When I peaked around the doorway, sure enough, he was caught "wire handed" with a hot

## NOTES

wire in each hand. Immediately he knew the game was up. He dropped those wires before I could get a word out of my mouth, and a sheepish look crept into his eyes. He sat there eyeing those wires a long moment, then eyeing me, then the wires, then me. Finally he made a decision. He turned his back on the wires, crawled over to me and began pulling on the legs of my trousers, which says, “Granddaddy, pick me up.” I picked him up, gave him a love. Then I got some safe toys for him to play with and told him these toys were OK, but the wires were out. He sat there playing with his toys until I finished shaving and we moved on to something more exciting.

Now, if I wanted to be theological about the thoughts, decisions, and actions of Little Bill during that episode, I would say that Little Bill experienced in his own way most of the emotions and decisions we have tagged with religious names, such as conviction, guilt, repentance, faith, obedience, and guidance. All of them were by-products of one thing — trust!

Jesus has a similar thing in mind when He says we must enter the kingdom of God like a little child! The trouble is, we expect trust to come as a by-product of all these other things instead of beginning there! A little child is exactly the opposite: he begins with trust and because of his trust he travels through conviction, guilt, repentance, faith, obedience and guidance to the new and good life! Little Bill repented and came to me in faith, then he obeyed me and followed my guidance--not because he understood these steps, but for one reason only: he began with trust. He trusted me!

Jesus is saying we must begin the same way. We must begin by trusting our lives to God in Christ, for that is the only way we can ever enter into the Kingdom of God, and come to repentance, faith and obedience. When we begin with trust, these other steps will follow naturally just as they do with a little child!

According to his journal, John Wesley says this was the catalyst which gave him new life. Before he experienced this new life — in fact for ten years before, John Wesley was constantly going on guilt trips as he was convicted of his sins—he was constantly repenting and expressing his faith in Jesus Christ and trying with all of his might to obey, only to fall away again each time. Then came the day on Aldersgate Street when he came like a little child. As he wrote in his journal, “I did trust in Christ and Christ alone for life now and eternally” (paraphrase). Immediately and for the next fifty years in this life, he experienced the blessings God always wanted him to have and he will continue to experience them through all eternity. Why? Because through trust like a little child he became a permanent citizen of the Kingdom of God. Jesus says that the secret to entering into God’s Kingdom is complete surrender — complete trust of your life to God in Christ like a little child.

### III. Blessings

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Then you are ready to receive the blessings of God. These blessings are many, but they can all be listed under three categories: Forgiveness, Love, and Peace. Forgiveness deals with our past, Love deals with our present, and Peace deals with the future. God delivers us from the bondage and guilt of our past through His blessing of forgiveness. God delivers us from the fear and anxiety about the future through His blessing of peace. God enables us to live joyfully, excitingly, and abundantly now through His blessing of love.

The Bible says that God has these same blessings for all who trust Him, for these are the blessings assured every citizen of God's Kingdom. The trouble is, Jesus says, we don't know how to receive the blessings of the Kingdom. Jesus says that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child cannot participate in these blessings. How does a little child accept the blessings of life? He accepts them as a matter of course, doesn't he? One minute a child can be punished for being naughty and the next minute he's throwing his arms around your neck totally forgiving you. Freely he accepts your love and freely he gives his to you in return. He accepts the security and peace of your arms as a matter of course.

How different are most grown-ups? Although Christ died to forgive us, many of us refuse to forgive ourselves. Although God has made our scarlet sins as white as snow, we continue to hold grudges and resentments; so, God cannot bless us. Although God loves us with an undying love in spite of ourselves, we cannot be blessed with this love because we refuse to accept it and let God channel it through us to others. Although underneath our lives are His almighty, everlasting arms, we let fear and anxiety steal away our blessings of peace. Jesus says to let a little child lead you if you are missing the blessings of God. He tells us to enter into these blessings like a little child by accepting them as a matter of course.

#### **IV. Growth**

Little Bill is learning how to walk now. He takes a step, then falls down, gets up, takes two more steps and falls down. No matter how many times he falls, he refuses to give up! That's the way a child grows and progresses. Innately, a little child knows he must take a lot of hard knocks in order to grow and he's willing to pay the price. How different from most of us grown-ups. I know some people who have dropped out of the church altogether and have no Christian fellowship, no worship, no Bible study, because of a slight by some other member or a grievance held against some preacher. In fact, some adults have not grown at all since their baptism because they are not willing to pay the price of growth. We can learn a lot from our little ones as we watch them pay the price of learning to walk and grow.

Notice that in our text the two verbs Jesus uses have to do with entering in the Kingdom, beginning our *journey into discipleship*. To begin as disciples

we must come like a little child, Jesus says, in accepting God's grace in Christ, in trusting ourselves to God, in receiving God's blessings and in beginning this growth process. The good news is, just as a one-year-old infant grows up to be a mature man, so spiritual growth and maturity is the goal for every disciple!

Growth into full maturity is God's plan for all of us. Just as we must enter this physical life as a child, so must we begin our spiritual life like a child. Just as God's plan for a little child is to grow up physically into a mature man or woman, so is this God's plan for us spiritually. This is why Jesus is teaching us these fifty discipleship lessons -- so we can become mature disciples, so we can grow up in Christ.

Nothing warms our hearts more and gives us more joy and pleasure than to share ourselves, our love and blessings with a little child or a grandchild who trusts us completely. Don't you imagine that God feels the same when we permit Him to share His grace, love and blessings with us — when we trust Him completely? Jesus says that it is so.

There's also a corollary to this we must never forget: nothing saddens our hearts more than to realize a little child is not growing. He's supposed to grow but he's not. He's remaining an infant when he should be a school boy, a youth and a man. Don't you imagine that God feels the same way about some of us grown-ups who are still "bottle babies" spiritually — we have the bodies of grown-ups, but the spirits of infants!

Childlikeness is essential to enter the Kingdom, but growth is essential to be disciples. They go together in God's order of things. There must be birth before there can be growth, but birth without growth is a tragedy! Birth and growth are essential parts of God's plan for us in both the physical and spiritual realms. This is our Lord's discipleship lesson for us:

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### **Discipleship Lesson #45**

**Discipleship begins with childlikeness, but it must go on to Christlikeness as we grow into full maturity in Christ!**

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I pray God will give all of us the heart of a child so we can enter into the Kingdom, and then begin in us the process of growth into the likeness of Christ that we may truly become His disciples.

## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #45?
2. There are two essential steps in God's Kingdom:  
What is essential in order to enter into the Kingdom?  
What is essential in order to become disciples?
3. God's blessings can be listed under three categories. What are these?

## Search the Scriptures

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4. How would you define trust?
5. Read the following Psalms about trusting God and write down what you learn concerning our part and God's part. Psalms 9:10; 13:5-6; 33:20-21; 37:3-6; 56:3-4; 62:8; 125:1.

## Internalize God's Word

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6. In 2 Peter 3:18 we are told to grow in grace and in our knowledge of God. What are some specific areas in which you would like to grow in grace?
7. Our sermon sets out four steps in beginning our journey into discipleship as a little child. We must:  
accept God's \_\_\_\_\_  
trust \_\_\_\_\_  
receive God's \_\_\_\_\_  
begin the process of \_\_\_\_\_

Pray, asking the Holy Spirit to apply the truths of this sermon to your own spiritual life. To discover how *Grace*, *Trust*, *Blessings*, and *Growth* are a part of your experience, ask him questions such as these:

Have I come to the Lord as a child, or have I tried to enter Life full-grown?

Where do I put my trust? In my own striving? In the grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ? In what others think?

Do I accept with joy and gratitude all that God wants to give me?

What does He want to give that I have not accepted?

Am I easily discouraged? When I get hurt as I'm learning to walk in the Spirit, how do I respond?

What is God's plan for my spiritual life?

*You may want to discuss your answers with a Christian friend.*

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**Memory scripture: 2 Peter 3:18**

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## Notes

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## Sermon 46: Discipleship Is Commitment

The story found in Luke 18:18-30 is a familiar one. A ruler, who is very rich, comes to Jesus with the ultimate question on his lips: *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* After some give and take about keeping God’s commandments, Jesus drives home the main point in verse 22, when He says to this rich ruler:

*“One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”*

Then follows the statement: *“But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich,”* which, of course, would make any normal person sad. Think about it, wouldn’t you be sad, too? Jesus notices his sadness and explains to him that this is not unusual and that he knows how hard this will be for him. It’s always hard for a person with riches to make such a commitment — as hard as a camel going through the eye of a needle, Jesus says.

Then, the disciples and others nearby get in the act and ask Jesus: *“Then who in the world can ever be saved?”* Jesus replies with this good news in verse 27:

*“What is impossible with man is possible with God.”*

Peter is still concerned and says, *“Lord, we”* — meaning the Twelve — *“have left everything: home, family, job — everything to follow you.”* Jesus concludes this discipleship teaching with these words in verses 29 and 30:

*“Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brother or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”*

What is the lesson here for us who would be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ today? What is the truth here for every person who wants to know God’s answer to this rich ruler’s question, *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* Is the answer to rush out and get rid of all of our material possessions? Is that the key to discipleship — to eternal life?

Why, of course not! There is no virtue in being destitute, just as there is no virtue in being rich — but we’ll all admit that being rich is a lot more enjoyable. Jesus is not setting before us a scale of justice and putting so much money on one side and saying, *“Now, if you have this much, you’re going straight to hell.”* Then taking so much money off the other side and saying, *“If you reduce your net worth to this amount you’ll go to heaven.”* That is ridiculous and the farthest thing from the Lord’s mind. This man’s problem is not money. It’s character! He relates character to the law — to

Scripture

Luke 18:18-30

Text

(Jesus) said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me ... What is impossible with men is possible with God ... Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”  
*Luke 18:22, 27, 29-30*

being good. But Jesus says “No!” Character comes from something else altogether and that something else is found in one word which contains our Lord’s 46th discipleship lesson. The word is “commitment!” Discipleship is commitment! Commitment is the secret to character. Commitment is the key which opens the door to God’s kingdom and eternal life. Let’s examine both sides — front and back — of this important word “commitment” and see what it means for us today.

### **I. Our Primary Commitment**

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As we look at the front side we see that it means first and foremost a commitment to Jesus Christ as the Ruler of our life. Not to law or to goodness, but to the person of Jesus Christ! That’s basic!

Jesus answers the man’s question by looking him in the eye and saying, *“Go, sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, then, come, follow me.”* Or, in other words, “Give up your old way of life — your old commitments — and come, follow Me! Make Me your first commitment!” Now, most of us — just like this rich ruler — whether we’re rich or poor, are so afraid Jesus is going to take something very precious from us that all we can see when we read this incident is the statement, “Go, sell it all, then give it all away.” Because of our preoccupation with our own worldly riches we miss the first truth, which is the primary truth here. Did you ever ask yourself, “Why is this man called a ruler? Why are we told he is not only a ruler, but a ruler with much wealth?” He not only ruled his own life, he also ruled the lives and destiny of all those under his domain.

This is an important fact, for Jesus is saying to him, “Fellow, in the way you’re living it’s apparent that your first commitment is to yourself as a ruler. You are proud of controlling your own life — of being the captain of your own soul — and of lording it over others! The first thing that has to go is this ruler complex, this playing God over your own life and the life of others.”

It is apparent that this is what Jesus is saying to him because the Bible says over and over that in the Kingdom of God there can be only one ruler and that ruler is God! That is the very heart of the Gospel. Also, at the heart of the gospel is another central truth, which is this: Jesus Christ is our God in the flesh. Wholly God. Wholly man. He was sent to us so we can make God ruler of our life, through Him!

Jesus says to this man and to all of us who want an answer to this man’s question, “If you are really sincere about being a disciple and receiving eternal life, the first thing you must do is give up your ruler complex and make Me the ruler of your life! — your Lord! Come, follow Me! Come, make this commitment first!” The first side of this great word is a primary commitment to Jesus Christ as the ruler — the Lord of our life! This is the main point Jesus wants us to grasp in this account. He wants us to see that

such a commitment is essential before the Lord can bless us in this life the way He wants to bless us, and this is the way we find have eternal life — through Christ as our Lord. The way of discipleship is a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord — as ruler!

## II. A concomitant Commitment

It just naturally follows that on the other side of this commitment is a concomitant commitment — the commitment to give up whatever keeps us from fulfilling our primary commitment to Christ as Lord. It must go, in order to make Him Lord!

“One thing you still lack,” Jesus says to this rich ruler. “In other words, one thing is still keeping you from making a primary commitment to Jesus Christ as ruler of your life!” Jesus tells the rich young ruler that in his case, this one thing is his money. Now, his problem was not money. His problem was his ruler complex — his character — trying to be God! His money was what he used in order to act like God; it was what motivated his ruler complex. His money was his power. His money blinded him to his need to make Jesus Lord. His money was what kept him from fulfilling this basic commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. Therefore, before he could make this basic commitment he had to give up this one thing which stood in his way.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses a number of different figures of speech — which are even more drastic than this one — to drive home this same important truth. After talking about adultery and lust, He says, “If your eye causes you to sin (that is, if it keeps you from making this primary commitment in life), then pluck it out. Or if it’s your hand, cut it off!”

The truth is obvious: whatever keeps us from making and keeping our primary commitment to Christ as Lord must go! It can be anything! Anything! No doubt, money and material possessions are the culprit most often with most of us. Not always! Some of the richest people I know are also some of the most committed people I know. These people treasure absolutely nothing above their Lord. Consequently, they use their riches as a way to fulfill their primary commitment. On the other hand, I know some poor folks who treasure dozens of things above their commitment to Christ.

The point is still true and we must not duck it — that it is extremely hard to be honest with ourselves and make a commitment to give up something we treasure, especially when that something is money. Jesus says that is exactly the commitment we must make when that which we treasure keeps us from fulfilling our primary commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord.

I know personally how hard it is, so let me illustrate this truth from an incident in my own life. Let me begin by saying that no church has ever been better to their pastor financially than you have been to me. In fact, no church has ever been better to their pastor in every way; but for the sake

## NOTES

of this illustration we'll stick with money. When I came here 15 years ago this church paid its pastor less than any other church in the Conference of comparable size. Today you pay your pastor more than any other church in the Conference, and you have for a number of years.

Before I go on with this illustration let me stop and clarify one thing, and say quite emphatically: Don't misunderstand me in the point I want to make, for I do not believe that to be a Christian you must put a limit on your income. God forbid! We have seen in studying the gifts of the Spirit that God specifically gives some people the gift of giving which includes the ability to make money — much money. so they can give money, much money, to the ministries of others. In fact, this making money and giving money is God's number one call on these persons' lives and this is their primary ministry. Thank God, we have many with this gift in our church who are fulfilling this call of God upon their lives willingly and generously. Without them we could never build the new facility which we need so desperately to do what God calls us to do as a church. I want to make this point emphatically clear: Christ places no limits upon how much money we can make as long as He is Lord of what we do make!

The salary a church pays a pastor is a different thing! Now, notice I said the salary a church pays a pastor, not what a pastor makes. Christ places no limits upon what anyone makes — including a pastor, as long as Christ is Lord of what we do make. If a pastor invests his money well or has other income there is no biblical or moral limit upon his income. The salary a church pays a pastor is a different thing! For you see, a church is a gathered community of Christians for the purpose of carrying on the whole ministry of Jesus, not just preaching and pastoring, and when a pastor's salary is increased above his needs at the expense of missions and program in the church, then I feel that pastor is not being faithful to his call to accept such increases. About two years ago, Harriett and I, after much prayer and discussion, felt my salary had reached this limit, but still we didn't want to put a ceiling on other employees; so we decided we would just give the increases back to the church in various ways.

Although our church budget was increased considerably this year, when we were still unable--because of lack of funds--to take the step forward in missions and programming we must take to fulfill our call as a church, the Lord spoke very plainly to Harriett and me and said the same thing He said to this rich ruler: "One thing you still lack!" Then He went on to impress upon me that I must not accept any more increases in my salary from the church for it would keep me from fulfilling my primary commitment to make Him Lord of my life as pastor of this church! In February of this year, I wrote to your Executive Committee — which consists of the top officers of our church — and I told them that Harriett and I would accept no more salary increases, and requested that such planned increases in the future go to missions and programming in our church. Here's the point, and hear this:

this doesn't mean that every pastor must do that to be the pastor our Lord wants him to be, just as Jesus does not mean every rich man must give up all of his money to be a disciple and to have eternal life. It means that just as this rich man's money was standing in his way, so would any more salary increases stand in my way if I am to be faithful to my call and faithful in leading you into the mission and ministry our Lord has laid on my heart for our church. Why? Because my salary was coming before fulfillment of that call, that's why. Because missions and programming had to take what was left — a backseat. What Jesus is telling us here is that we cannot fulfill our call as disciples and carry on His ministry in the church with leftovers! He must come first!

Now, that's hard — extremely hard -- for all of us have a touch of that in us which John D. Rockefeller described so well in his answer to the question, "How much money does it take to have enough?" Rockefeller answered wisely, "Just one more dollar!" Jesus says exactly the same thing in verse 27 when He says:

*"What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Lk 18:27).*

No man or woman on his/her own can resist the temptation for "just one more dollar." It's part of our natural being. That's why the commitment to Christ must come first, for only when we begin to see money with the eyes of Christ and thus see the good it can do the Kingdom of God can we find the power to use our money for Him instead of for self! "What is impossible with men is possible with God, through Jesus Christ as Lord of our life!"

This leaves only a final word, which is really the bottom line of it all: the last two verses of our Scripture, verses 29 and 30, where Jesus promises that no one ever gives up anything for Him and His kingdom who does not receive back many fold in this life and in the age to come eternal life. Notice the reward for being a good and faithful steward with our life and our possessions is not only in heaven, off yonder, but it's also in this life — now!

Let me illustrate again with my own life. The hardest decision I ever made in my life was to give up my position and my salary as Vice-President and General Counsel of Consolidated Gas Utilities Corporation in 1959 to answer my Lord's call to "Come, follow Me" and to "go pastor the little church at Sallisaw for \$4,800 per year." It was hard for, you see, all of my life my first commitment had been to have such a position and to make such money. It was hard to change such primary commitment. I had to obey that call to be standing here today where you have blessed me and my family "many fold in this life!" I actually shudder when I think of what I would have missed. I would not have received the manifold blessings my Lord had in store for me through you during all these years -- and the best is still to come -- if I had put my job and compensation at that time

above His call upon my life. But how I was tempted to do so and how I rationalized that I could do more good for God right where I was.

I can stand here today and honestly say I have no needs — absolutely none — that you have not met many times over. And, of course, I realize you are the Lord's instrument in fulfilling this promise to me; and, likewise, He uses me and others to fulfill His promise to you. As I told the Executive Committee in my letter to them: "Harriett and I truly consider ourselves the wealthiest of people in every way, and honestly have everything we want and need!"

Dear friends, this is the Gospel — this is the good news our Lord promises to all of us. He is saying to all of us the same thing He was saying long ago to this rich ruler who treasured money above character: "Step out on faith and try it, so I can bless you richly in this life and give you eternal life as well!" That's His promise to us when we make this primary commitment in life to Him as Lord of our lives. He is also telling us that before we can sincerely make such a commitment, we must first deal honestly with the one thing we still lack. We must get rid of anything that has our first commitment now! "For no person can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon." This is our Lord's 46th discipleship lesson; and it's all wrapped up in this one word — commitment.

Discipleship is commitment — commitment to Christ first! The way to manifold blessings in this life and eternal life hereafter is commitment — commitment to Christ first! That is our discipleship lesson.

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### **Discipleship Lesson #46**

**Discipleship is commitment and commitment is stewardship and stewardship is the way we give ourselves to God and the way we make it possible for God to give Himself to us!**

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## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #46?
2. What is the key that opens the door to God's Kingdom and eternal life?
3. How would you define commitment?
4. According to the Scripture text, what is the reward for good and faithful stewardship of our life and our possessions?

## Search the Scriptures

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5. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 Paul speaks of the "grace of giving" and the example of the Macedonian churches. What was their first commitment? (v.5)
6. John 12:27 tells us Jesus' commitment to the Father. In the preceding verse what were Jesus' words to His disciples concerning commitment?

## Internalize God's Word

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7. Use Philippians 3:4b-14 as a basis for personal prayer. First summarize the content of each of three sections:  
verses 4b-6 — What had formerly been primary in Paul's life?  
verses 7-11 — How would you characterize this statement of commitment to Christ?  
verses 12-14 — What are Paul's intentions regarding this commitment?
8. Paul was obviously motivated by love for the Lord, not merely by a sense of duty nor by an enlightened self-interest. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as you think about your own commitment to Christ. *First ask yourself, Am I committed to Jesus Christ as Lord of my life? If so, what is my motivation?*

The following questions might help you sort out your thoughts.

To what do my thoughts usually turn?

Where and how do I spend most of my time? My energy? My money?

Write about your own commitments, following Paul's pattern.

Former priorities and commitments

Present primary commitment

Your intentions about the future

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**Memory scripture: Luke 6:38**

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## Sermon 47: Discipleship Is Taking Up the Cross

We are nearing the end of our *Journey Into Discipleship*. At the end, of course, is Jerusalem and Golgotha — and a stark cross. In our 47th discipleship lesson in Luke 18:31-34, Jesus tells the disciples that before there can be resurrection and power in their lives there must be a cross. Then Luke says:

*“But they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (Lk 18:34).*

That’s understandable, isn’t it, since Jesus spoke these words to the Twelve on the other side of Golgotha — on the other side of the Cross and Easter. It’s not so understandable when most of us must admit that these same words could be said about many of us as disciples living on this side of Golgotha and Easter. Many of us, even 2,000 years after the happening, still have problems with this central message of the Christian faith — the message of the Cross. Although in every Christian church throughout the world the Cross is always given a central place, as it is here in our church, many who worship regularly in all these churches have trouble understanding what Jesus means when He says the Cross was essential for Him and it is also essential for us before we can follow Him. Hear His words again:

*“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25).*

“Would-be” disciples from the beginning until now have failed to grasp the meaning of the Cross. Why? It is because we fail to understand that the Cross must always be an experience, not a theory! It is an experience to be lived out, not a theory to be reasoned out and explained. There was no way the first disciples could have understood the Cross before Golgotha and Easter, so Jesus was preparing them for an experience after Golgotha and Easter — an experience which they had and which equipped them to be true disciples. This is what this discipleship lesson should do for us, too. It should prepare us for the experience which will equip us to be the disciples our Lord calls us to be!

I am convinced that our confusion about the Cross often results from trying to make it into a theory instead of an experience. Across the centuries we have contrived one theory after another about the Cross. Here are the names scholars and theologians have given a few of these theories: “the sacrificial theory,” “the penal theory,” “the ransom theory,” “the moral-influence theory,” “the substitutionary theory,” “the example theory,” “the

### Scripture

Luke 18:31-34

### Text

But they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

*Luke 18:34*

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

*Matthew 16:24*

## NOTES

mystical theory,” “the vicarious-repentance theory,” “the governmental theory” and there are still others. When we read about the Cross we must stumble through such unfamiliar and obscure words as: sacrifice, expiation, atonement, propitiation, justification, and the blood of Christ and as we do we become more confused. When I think of all of these obscure words and theories of the Cross, I am reminded again of something Mark Twain said, which perfectly illustrates this point. When his wife, in an effort to stop Mark Twain from cursing, memorized his curse words and parroted them back to him, he said to her: “My dear, you’ve got the right words, but the wrong tune!” This is what happens to us when we use the terminology of the Cross without experiencing it. We have the right words but the wrong tune.

Last Wednesday night after Bible study, where we dealt with many of these technical words in the book of Hebrews, someone said to me, “It’s this terminology that gets me. It throws me. I don’t understand it. I want the Bible to speak to me in words I can understand.” This is what I want to do this morning: I want to speak to you about the Cross in words we all can understand. The more we read about all these different theories and technical words the more bewildered we become, because the Cross is not meant to be a theory, but an experience! Ask even the most educated theologian to explain these theories of the Cross to you and after a series of long, complicated sentences filled with strange, indecipherable words, if he’s honest he must finally say, “Well, to tell you the truth, I don’t really understand it myself!” For in looking at the Cross as a theory we have tried to see the Cross from the God-ward side — to explain it -- instead of from the man-ward side and experience it! This is impossible, so we get more confused.

Believe me, as long as you try to make the Cross into a theory and explain it, it will be, in the words of Paul, “a stumbling block” and “foolishness.” To the Jews it was a stumbling block, said Paul, because they tried to explain everything according to the moral law and the Cross cannot fit into law. It is greater than law, it is above it, it is the grace of God. The Cross is not law, but grace, and grace must be experienced.

The Cross was “foolishness to the Greeks,” said Paul, because they tried to explain everything according to man’s knowledge and logic, and the Cross transcends man’s knowledge. No person can come to this central meaning of the Cross through logic. “You must die to live!” That’s a paradox — you can’t explain it! You can come there only through experience. The Cross is as far above the mind of man as the heavens are above the earth. The Cross is not something contrived in the mind of man, but rather something inherent in the nature of God — His grace. We can’t understand it. We can’t explain it. The good news is, we can experience it -- and that is what really matters!

## I. The actuality of the experience itself

NOTES

The Bible says that Christianity must always begin with this experience. In the experience of the repentant thief on the cross we see a perfect picture of the four distinct parts of this life-changing experience. This is no theory; this is something that actually happens to a living human being, and because of the Bible we can share in that experience. Let's get inside of this thief now and experience it with him. I'm not talking about the outward facts, for few of us can enter into that experience. But all of us can experience the four things that happened in his inner being.

### Helplessness

First was his experience of helplessness and hopelessness. His feeling of inadequacy, of having no resources. He comes up against something he can't handle on his own. This happens to all of us, doesn't it? He knows he is utterly alone and helpless. He's bound to that humiliating, ominous cross and there is absolutely no way he can get himself down. Oh, he knows he deserves it, but that doesn't lessen his despair and pain. There he hangs, alone, helpless, hopeless. Now, this is not a theory, this is an experience. He feels it! In his very bone marrow, he feels it! As he faces life's darkest moment he feels totally inadequate.

### Recognition

Second is his experience of "seeing the light" — the experience of recognition. In the depths of his painful despair and total inadequacy he looks up and sees the light as he looks into the face of the One who is adequate, and in that second he knows! He experiences that moment of truth to which all of us can relate .

He doesn't try to figure out why Jesus is adequate. Immediately, he knows it! He feels it! It is a life-absorbing experience. In Jesus, he sees all the power and truth of God Almighty. In Jesus, he sees love personified. In Jesus, he sees the only one in all heaven and earth who can save him from this terrible despair and utter hopelessness. He recognizes Jesus as his Savior. This is an experience, not a theory — and what an experience! It is a life-changing experience!

### Letting Go

Third is his experience of turning loose, of letting go. He experiences trust. He gives himself completely — poor, miserable wretch that he is — into the eternal care of Jesus. "Lord," he says, "there's not much of me left. What there is, is yours!" In effect, he says, "All this garbage I have collected in a lifetime of sin and crime I now put into your outstretched arms, for you can handle it; I can't! All of my inadequacy, all of my fears, all of my hopes, all of my hate — everything I give to You, Jesus, in trust. The moment of truth he experiences leads him into a deeper experience of commitment. Again, this is no theory, this is an experience. It's like getting a second wind when

you're running. You can't explain it, but you can sure feel it. You can sure use it. You can sure experience it!

### **Assurance**

Fourth is his experience of being one with Christ — the experience of assurance. Jesus says to him, "Today you will be with Me in paradise!" The key words here are "with Me" — with Jesus. This is Paradise: being with Jesus and knowing it! He experienced this oneness with Jesus. He experienced his whole, sinful, rotten self being absorbed into the spotless, divine life of Jesus Christ. This is the oneness — the assurance — he experienced. As he became one with Christ his old life passed away and he was a new creature in Christ. In short, he experienced the greatest experience possible for man: the grace of God — the experience of forgiveness and acceptance.

This is what the Cross of Christ is all about! Like the scholars and theologians, if you want to, you can give this life-changing experience of the grace of God a high-sounding name, such as: "justification," "redemption," "atonement," "conversion," "salvation" — that does not really matter. Or, you can name each of the parts such as conviction of sin, confession, repentance, faith and forgiveness. Or, you can tie the parts and the whole together and give this experience a technical, theological name, such as: "justification by faith." That's really immaterial. In other words, it's not so much the words you use that matter, but rather the tune you put them to. The experience is the important thing!

The Cross of Christ — Christ's death on Golgotha — symbolizes life's most meaningful experience for man: the grace of God — the experience of forgiveness and acceptance. This is no theory, but life's greatest experience — the experience of the actuality of new life! The death of one person and the birth of another! The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!

## **II. The "afterglow" of that experience**

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Something happens to us, and if it is meaningful the effect of it continues, and the afterglow is even more precious than the original experience. When marriage is truly holy matrimony it is like that. Certainly, Christianity is like that! The Cross is not only central in the experience of the actuality of new life, but the Cross is also central to the continuation or the actual living of this new life! The Bible is clear that to be a Christian we must come to the Cross in two ways:

First, we must come to the historical Christ hanging on the Cross as our Savior, as the thief did.

Second, we must come to the Living Christ as Lord, and in obedience to His command, take up our own cross daily and follow Him. One initiates the Christian experience; the other keeps it alive.

Whereas the thief is the best biblical illustration of the first, Paul is the best biblical illustration of the second. Of course, just like the thief on the cross, Paul on the road to Damascus had a life-changing encounter with Christ. Like the thief he experienced inadequacy, seeing and recognizing Jesus, trust, assurance and oneness with Christ. But Paul went on to a second human experience which the thief did not have. For the next thirty years or so Paul went from what he called one glory to the next. Paul not only experienced the Cross on the road to Damascus; after that he experienced the cross daily in his heart as he followed the way of the Cross on the roads of Asia Minor as he walked the dusty trails to Perga, Antioch, Lystra, and Derbe. He experienced the way of the Cross in the fabulous province of Macedonia as he visited the great Greek cities of Corinth, Athens and Thessalonica. He experienced the way of the Cross on the high seas as he journeyed to the small island of Cyprus, the Holy City of Jerusalem, and the world's capital of Rome. He experienced the way of the Cross in the palatial grand palaces of the kings and the run-down, humble homes of peasants, and the catacombs of persecuted Christians. He experienced the way of the Cross during the times of jubilant adoration when others called him a god and during humiliating times of stoning and imprisonment when they spat on him and called him scum. He experienced it while filled with unspeakable joy and while his body wracked with excruciating pain. In fact, in whatever state Paul found himself he experienced victory, because he was determined to know nothing among them except Christ, and Him crucified, because he took up his own cross daily and followed Christ.

Paul actually experienced the great paradox of the Gospel that can never be explained logically, but can be experienced by all who dare. Day after day as Paul lost more of himself into the crucified Christ, the more perfect life became for him. The more he died to self, the more he lived! Paul found that the experience of the Cross was not simply a cleansing of his old life (as wonderful as that was), but even more wonderful it was a joyful setting out for what lies ahead.

All of Paul's letters are a restatement of this truth. They don't explain the way of the Cross, for no man can do that; they simply proclaim it with different figures of speech and witness to the truth of it! The more you identify with the crucified Christ, the greater the victory for you! The more you die to self, the more life He will resurrect in you! That's the great paradox of the Gospel and the way of the Cross: The more you die, the more you live! Paul says that the whole thrust of his life that brought him such joy was *"to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and to share in his sufferings; so he could become like him in his death and be resurrected into even greater life"* (Phil 3:10). "To share in His sufferings" that's the key to life! "Dying to live" is the way of the Cross.

Oh, I know this is a stumbling block to those who must know all of the

NOTES

answers. I know this is foolishness to those who equate their own knowledge with truth, and their logic as the only way to a better life. Oh, I know that this way of the Cross is not the way to attract the masses who are looking for short cuts and bargain counters. Dear friend, the Bible says it is the way to experience the joyful, victorious life, and to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says it is the only way any person can experience the death of those terrible enemies that rob us of life, such as pride, greed, selfishness, lust, envy, bitterness, critical spirits, fear, prejudice, boredom, anger, nasty tongues, loneliness, immorality, grief and all kinds of debilitating habits. Until we actually experience the death of these enemies there is no way we can experience resurrection into a new life of perfect love.

This is the heart of the gospel. It is the central message of our faith. Perhaps it has been vague and bewildering to some because they are more interested in trying to explain it than experience it! According to the Bible, Christianity is not a theory or even a religion; it is the experience of death and new life, and that experience must always begin at the Cross of Christ, when through faith we receive the forgiveness and acceptance He offers us, just like the thief on the Cross.

Also according to the Bible, for that new life to continue and become a joyful, victorious, daily way of life, the Cross must continue to be the center of our faith, as we take up our own cross daily and follow Him. Unless daily we are taking to the Cross of Christ that selfishness and self-centeredness within us to be crucified with Christ, so we can be resurrected with Him, there is no way we can be disciples and follow Him. This is our 47th discipleship lesson:

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**Discipleship Lesson #47**

**If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Mt 16:24-25).**

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## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #47?
2. What is the primary reason so many people fail to grasp the meaning of the Cross?
3. This experience consists of two parts. Name them.
4. Name the four things that happened in the experience of the repentant thief on the cross.
5. Paul on the road to Damascus had a second experience which the thief did not have. What was that experience?

## Search the Scriptures

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6. Those who are “in Christ” no longer have to live in slavery to sin (Romans 6).

We now have (v. 4)

What happened to our old self or old nature and why (v. 6-7)?

In verses 12-13 we are told what our part is in living out this new life we have “in Christ”. What is our responsibility? (Also see Ephesians 4:22-24)

## Internalize God's Word

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7. Often as we pray we are so busy thinking and talking that we never get quiet enough to hear the still, small voice of the Spirit. Take time now to relax physically as in *Steps in Praying God's Word* in the Appendix. Let your mind and spirit also come to rest. Then ask God the following questions, waiting after each one for Him to show you the answer.

In what ways am I experiencing the Cross in my life?

Are there areas where I am not walking in newness of life?

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**Memory scripture: Ephesians 4:22-24**

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## Notes

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## Sermon 48: You Are the Light of the World!

One of the most important metaphors used in the Bible to explain the Christian life is the metaphor of light and darkness. Becoming a Christian, the Bible says, is like going from darkness to light. Being a disciple for Jesus Christ is like being a light to a darkened world. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to His disciples:

*“You are the light of the world ...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:14, 16).*

How do we go from darkness to light? How can we be light to a darkened world? These are the questions that Jesus answers for us in our 48th discipleship lesson in our *Journey Into Discipleship*. He does it in the context of a healing miracle as He heals a blind beggar named Bartimaeus on the streets of Jericho. Our Scripture is found in Luke 18:35-43, and the same account is also recorded in Mark 10:45-52, and it is in Mark that we are told the beggar’s name is “Bartimaeus,” which means “the son of Timaeus.”

In this miracle Jesus not only heals Bartimaeus, but He also shows us in graphic detail the six stages that every person must pass through to go from darkness to light. In this miraculous healing of blind Bartimaeus Jesus shows us in a way we can always remember how, as His disciples, we can be light to a darkened world — how we can lead others from darkness to light. In one sense, this Scripture is an exposition on the exact meaning of those two important words with which Jesus opens His ministry — the two words He uses first to tell us how to go from darkness to light -- the words “repent” and “believe,” or “repentance” and “faith.” Mark tells us that Jesus began His earthly ministry with these words:

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

It is in this healing of blind Bartimaeus that Jesus shows us the three stages every person must go through in order to truly repent (that is, to get out of darkness) and then, the three stages that are absolutely essential to live a life of faith (that is, to stay in the light). This is the lesson we must learn if we are to be His disciples – if we are to make our journey from darkness to light – and also help others truly repent and believe in the Gospel.

### Scripture

Luke 18:35-43

### Text

As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside, begging ... And he cried, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And (they) rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more ... And Jesus... commanded him to be brought to him ... (And throwing off his mantle... he came to Jesus) and said, “Lord, let me receive my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight: your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed (Jesus), glorifying God.  
*Luke 18:35, 38-43 and Mark 10:50*

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## Discipleship Lesson #48

**A disciple moves out of darkness through repentance, and stays in the light through living a life of faith.**

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To make it easier for us to remember all six of these stages I will use alliteration, naming each stage with a word beginning with the letter "R". First, let's examine the three stages of repentance, of getting out of darkness.

### I. The Three Stages of Repentance

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#### Stage 1- Recognition

Before we can ever begin this journey from darkness to light we must come to the point where we recognize two things, and these are the same two things that Bartimaeus begins by recognizing:

First, we must recognize our own need; and,

Second, we must recognize Jesus as the one who can meet our need.

Look at blind Bartimaeus sitting there in his rags on the streets of Jericho: nothing to do but beg and throw himself upon the mercy of others. An outcast. It's hard to picture a person with a greater need. In a very real sense, our need is the same as his, and this is what Jesus wants us to see here. He wants us to see ourselves like a blind man groping in a dark world, just hoping that good luck will come our way.

The first truth the Bible emphasizes in this miracle is that Bartimaeus recognized his own need. Listen to him when he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing his way. He cries out, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!*" First, he recognizes he has a need bigger than his own resources. Second, he recognizes that Jesus is the one who can meet his need! According to the Bible, we must also recognize these two truths before we can ever walk from darkness to light:

- First, we must recognize our own need for the "saving grace" and the "life-renewing power" of Almighty God.
- Second, we must recognize that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into our world to meet this need for us!

Just recognizing our need is never enough, for without going on and recognizing the one person who can meet that need, we are left with "bad news" not "good news!" It is recognizing Jesus Christ as God's answer for our need that makes it "good news!" Like blind Bartimaeus, when we are confronted by the Savior of Mankind, we must quickly say:

"Pass me not, O gentle Savior,  
Hear my humble cry,

While on others Thou are calling,  
Do not pass me by.”

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## Stage 2 – Resistance

The first stage in true repentance is recognition. The second is resistance — resisting the temptation to stay as you are. Notice: as soon as Bartimaeus cries out for help, the crowd begins to rebuke him and say, “Be quiet! Stay where you are!” This is a temptation that is common to man, and the big problem for many of us is that we resist change instead of resisting the temptation to stay like we are. Ask anyone who has ever been involved in visitation evangelism and they will tell you that the number one obstacle they encounter is this temptation for people to stay like they are: resisting change instead of resisting this damnable temptation! The key to personal conversion is resisting this temptation to stay like you are. The key to church growth is resisting this temptation. The Evil One whispers in the church member’s ear, “Stay like you are. Don’t get too involved, or they’ll call you a fanatic. Think of your image. Stay like you are!” Sure enough, nothing happens!

Thomas Edison once said, “I’m not a great inventor, for most of my inventions were the ideas of other persons who quit too soon. I simply took advantage of the opportunity that they let pass by.” How true! Very few of us seize the opportunities that come our way, because it is so much easier to stay like we are. Especially is this true in our *“Journey Into Discipleship”* — our journey from darkness to light. The most miserable people I meet are those who have just enough religion to make them aware of what they are missing, but not enough to go all the way and make Jesus Christ the Lord of their daily lives. Their problem is “resistance” — they are resisting change, instead of resisting the temptation to stay like they are! Not Bartimaeus! When the crowd tried to keep him in his miserable condition, the Bible says, he cries out all the more: “Jesus have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!”

The point is clear: the stronger the world tempts us, the more we must seek Jesus to deliver us from this temptation. Fannie Crosby, the blind hymn writer, in her great hymn, “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior,” calls this temptation “our own unbelief,” and she says in the second stanza of her great hymn that the only way we can ever resist this temptation is by looking to Jesus for our guidance instead of to the world. She sings,

“O Jesus, let me at thy throne of mercy  
Find a sweet relief;  
Kneeling there in deep contrition,  
Help my unbelief.”

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“Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior.” Words: Fanny Crosby, 1868. Music: Howard Doane, 1870. CCLI 80672.

### Stage 3 – Repentance

The second stage in true repentance is resistance — resisting the temptation to stay like we are. The third is the act of repentance itself, that is, turning your back on your old way of life. We are told in our Scripture that when Jesus heard the plea of Bartimaeus that He stopped and called him. Then what happened? Here is what the Bible says happened, in Mark’s account (paraphrased) of the story:

*“Bartimaeus threw off his old, dirty, ragged mantle and came to Jesus!”*

To understand the underlying truth here, we need to first understand that the mantle, or cloak, worn by men then was simply a square piece of cloth like a blanket, and the poor used it for both a coat by day and a blanket by night. It was the mark of a beggar, huddled on the street wrapped up in a dirty, ragged mantle. This dirty, ragged mantle identified him with his poor, miserable, wretched life.

Before coming to Jesus, Bartimaeus throws off this old, dirty, ragged mantle. He bares himself completely before his Lord. This, says the Bible, is an essential step in going from darkness to light: we must throw off the filthy mantles we have wrapped ourselves in. We must leave that filth behind us, for it is a part of what we have been, not of what Jesus wants us to become. That’s what it means to repent. It means to turn your back on your old way of life that has kept you in darkness. It means to cast the filth out of your life as surely as Bartimaeus cast off his filthy mantle. Then you have completed the three stages of repentance, and you are ready to move on to the three stages of living a life of faith.

## II. The Three Stages of Living a Life of Faith

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### Stage 1 – Responsiveness

The first stage in living a life of faith is the stage of responsiveness. We write it in our bulletin each Sunday morning in our order of service. Following the “Hearing of God’s Word” we always have “We Respond to God’s Word.” That’s always the first step in living a life of faith: a faithful response to God’s Word to us.

When Jesus called Bartimaeus, he not only threw off his old, dirty, ragged mantle. But we are also told this: “He sprang up and came to Jesus!” He responded to the call of Christ upon his life. Faith must always begin with this response. It was the beginning of a life of faith for Paul, when on the road to Damascus he responded to the call of Christ with, “Lord, what will you have me do?”

I have in my files a clipping from the Reader’s Digest several years ago about a Brooklyn-born artist named George Wally, who went to Puerto Rico to live over a quarter of a century ago, and through the love of Christ

became involved with blind students there. God laid on his heart a call to help the blind learn how to appreciate art, so they could actually become artists themselves and find beauty in their dark world.

For years he endured hunger, disappointment and stark poverty as he struggled in vain to find “the key” that would enable these blind students to appreciate art and become artists. Then one day he found this “key” while he was playing the violin. As he fingered the violin without looking at the strings or looking at his fingers, he suddenly realized this was “the key” to teaching the blind to paint. He developed a “fixed fingering” position for blind artists, by making perforations along the border of the sheet of drawing paper or canvas. As they put their fingers in these perforations he then gave them directions. At first, however, this method was as unsuccessful as the others he had tried. As he gave directions the blind students simply stared blankly into space. Then one day as he patiently spoke to them again, a 23-year-old girl named Eva, who was born blind, suddenly cried out: “Vio! I see! I see!” For the first time she really heard his directions and responded properly. Because she responded properly she discovered a whole new world. Because she responded properly she began traveling that wonderful journey from darkness to light!

George Wally says that “at some unpredictable point in the instruction, each of the other blind students had a similar experience” — an experience of truly responding to his directions, and from that moment though they were blind, now they could “see!” Isn’t it the same with us? We read the Bible, we pray, we go to church, we sing the hymns, listen to the sermons, but darkness still engulfs us. Then one day we hear God’s call to us personally, and we respond. Like Bartimaeus of old we “spring up and go to Jesus” shouting, “Vio! I see! I see!” To live a life of faith we must first make a faithful response to Christ’s call upon our lives.

## **Stage 2 – Receptivity**

Then, we must move on to the second stage in a life of faith, which is receptivity. After Bartimaeus sprang up and went to Jesus, Jesus asked him what he wanted and Bartimaeus answered, “Lord, let me receive my sight.” Jesus replied, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” Then, the Bible says this: “Immediately, he received his sight.” Bartimaeus moved from darkness to light because he was receptive to what Christ offered him!

For us to move from darkness to light we must also be receptive to what Christ offers us. To be disciples for our Lord we must first be receptive to what He offers us. The Bible is clear that Christ offers all of us the greatest gift of all: His Holy Spirit. He promises us, “I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you. I will give My Holy Spirit to everyone who asks Me.” The Bible specifically says, “God pours his love into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit which he gives us.” If you do not have the love or joy or peace that you need and want, or if you lack in patience, or kindness or goodness, or

if you are unable to muster the faithfulness, gentleness or self-control that life demands, then the cause is apparent: you have not been receptive to our Lord's offer of His Holy Spirit. He says that these nine things are "the fruit of His Holy Spirit" and if you have His Spirit your life will bear this fruit!

Many of us fail to receive the power and renewing we need each week when we worship, simply because we do not enter the sanctuary in a spirit of receptivity. This spirit of receptivity is essential to a life of faith! God tells us in His Holy Word about 27 specific gifts of the Spirit that He has for us: powerful gifts (like miracles and healing), enlightening gifts (like knowledge, wisdom, and prophecy), practical gifts (like administration, teaching, and serving and helping), freeing gifts (like discernment, tongues and faith), and, ministering gifts (like pastor, evangelist, teacher and prophet). That's where the power is in the Christian's life. That's how God reveals Himself and His truth to us. That's how God assures us of our own salvation and of His Holy Presence in our lives! That's the only way any person can ever live a life of faith, by being receptive to the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That's the second stage of a life of faith: receptivity. And you can't have faith without it!

### **Stage 3 – Relationship**

The third and final stage is the stage of relationship — a daily relationship with the Living Christ. Notice how the Bible concludes this account of the healing of Bartimaeus. Luke says that after Bartimaeus received his sight that "he followed Jesus, glorifying God." Mark concludes his account by simply saying that Bartimaeus "followed Jesus on the way." Both mean the same thing: he stayed with Jesus. As soon as his crisis was over, Bartimaeus didn't forget Jesus. No! He stayed with Jesus! He followed Him on the way! He kept a close, daily relationship with Jesus as his Lord.

So often a pastor sees just the opposite as people turn to God during a crisis, but they soon forget their need for Him when the crisis is over. Without this daily relationship their faith begins to die. Perhaps the saddest people a pastor sees are those who seek God in a crisis, but can't find Him when they need Him most because they have failed to keep their faith alive through a daily relationship with Him. What a difference it makes when you walk hand in hand with Christ through life, then:

Just when you need him, Jesus is near,  
Just when you falter, just when you fear,  
Jesus is near to comfort and cheer,  
Just when you need him most."

This is why it is so important for all of us to discipline ourselves in "the means" that Christ uses to make Himself real in our lives — what we Methodists call "the means of grace," such as, prayer, worship, Bible study, and Holy Communion. We must discipline ourselves to –

1. begin each day in prayer with Him,
2. draw aside each week to worship and praise Him,
3. study the Bible regularly under competent leadership so we can know His plan for our lives, and
4. make Holy Communion with Him a symbol for all of life.

Then we will keep a living, vital relationship with Him day in and day out, as we follow Him along the way. As our relationship with Christ grows, so will our faith grow, enabling us to move from darkness to light.

Well, there are the six stages we all must go through in our journey from darkness to light in our "*Journey Into Discipleship*:" three that lead to repentance that get us out of darkness, and three that insure us of living a life of faith, of staying in the light. Just as Jesus called to blind Bartimaeus long ago, so is He calling to us to come to Him today!

Do you recognize your need for Him?

Are you resisting the temptation to stay as you are?

Have you turned your back on your old life through repentance?

Are you making a faithful response to His call on your life?

Are you keeping a close, daily relationship with Him as you follow Him on the way?

If so, you have His promise that you will move from darkness to light and you will become the light of the world!

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### **Discipleship Lesson #48**

**A disciple moves out of darkness through repentance, and stays in the light through living a life of faith.**

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## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #48?
2. According to this sermon, what are the three stages every person must go through in order to repent?
3. What are the three stages essential to live a life of faith and stay in the light?

## Search the Scriptures

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4. We have one of two choices: either light or darkness. Why do some choose darkness? (John 3:19-20)
5. Jesus tells us that He is the Light of the world and believers are light in the world. Ephesians 5:8-11 emphasizes the contrast between light and darkness. Verse 8 tells us that we are now .

As Christians how are we to live (v. 8)?

What will be the fruit of our lives (v. 9)?

## Internalize God's Word

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6. Our God is a communicating God. He wants to communicate with you personally. Prepare yourself for conversation with Him by relaxing your body, mind, and spirit. Then one by one ask these questions (from page 2), making them your own questions in order to deepen your relationship with Him. Be sure to listen for His answer before moving to the next question. Respond as the Spirit leads.

Do I recognize my need for You?

Am I resisting the temptation to stay as I am?

Have I turned my back on my old life through repentance?

Am I making a faithful response to Your call on my life?

Am I receptive to everything You want to give me now?

Am I keeping a close, daily relationship with You as I follow You on the way?

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**Memory scripture: 1 John 1:7**

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## Sermon 49: The Transforming Power of Christ

I think I should tell you before preaching this sermon what this particular Scripture — about Zacchaeus and Jesus — does to congregations. Because the last time I preached on this Scripture I got a standing ovation from the congregation. Honestly! Oh, it wasn't here. It was another congregation.

It happened like this, 10 or 12 years ago. When I came to Tulsa as your pastor -- 15 years ago today -- my wife Harriett accepted a teaching position with the Tulsa Public Schools as Music Teacher at Dunbar Elementary School and taught there until the school closed last year. When she began she was the only white person, both faculty and student body, in this all-black school. Consequently, her closest associates at work and some of her dearest friends were black, especially one particular teacher who was a committed Christian and active church worker. During our vacation that year, at this woman's invitation, Harriett and I worshipped in her all-black church here in Tulsa. We were the only white people in the congregation that Sunday. We heard some very spirited singing, participated in an inspiring worship service, and listened to an excellent sermon on this Scripture of Zacchaeus and Jesus found in the 10th chapter of Luke.

In fact, everything was so inspiring and moving that the service didn't stop at that sacred hour of 12:00 o'clock noon; but went on to about 12:40, when the preacher got up to give the benediction — I thought. Instead of giving the benediction, the preacher said how delighted the congregation was to have Dr. and Mrs. Thomas with them this morning and after a glowing introduction — which, incidentally, I loved — concluded: "Now, we will have the honor of Dr. Thomas coming and preaching a sermon for us."

As I walked toward the pulpit, I thought: "Now, what could any preacher say to a congregation at 12:45 that they would appreciate?" I said to myself, "Lord, I can't answer that question, so you better help me!" Never did I need help more, and I'm confident I never preached a more God-inspired sermon! For I stepped into the pulpit, with the clock approaching 1:00 o'clock, and said: "I want to use the same Scripture our preacher just used about Zacchaeus and Jesus; and, as is my custom, I want to make three points about this Scripture:

1. The first point is: Zacchaeus is "up a tree," just like I am and you are now.
2. The second point is: Jesus called to Zacchaeus and told him to come down and go home as He is calling to me now.

### Scripture

Luke 19:1-10

### Text

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house ... For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

*Luke 19:8-10*

3. The third point is: Zacchaeus was smart enough to obey, and so am I! Let's go home! You are dismissed.

Honestly, I received a standing ovation! O.K., you don't have to say it, for I know what you're thinking: I could get another one if I'd do the same thing today. But it's only 11:30 and I'm not going to do it! Oh, I will still share three points about this Scripture, but they will be three different points, I hope.

Notice the last two verses of this Scripture — verses 9 and 10 — where Jesus says to Zacchaeus:

*"Today salvation has come to this house ... For the Son of man has come to seek and to save the lost" (Lk 19:9-10).*

What is salvation? In its simplest terms, salvation is God's way of making a new person. The Bible says, "Salvation is God in Christ, saving us from death and giving us life." In short, "salvation" is the Biblical word which describes "the transforming power of Christ." The Biblical account of the transformation of Zacchaeus is the best account in the Bible of how "this transforming power of Christ" actually works in the life of an ordinary, hard-working, ambitious human being like most of us; that is, how it works in a practical, down-to-earth, day-to-day way. Here we see before our very eyes "the re-making of a man!" Here we see what Paul later calls "a new creation" being made before our very eyes. Here we see being lived out before us, in a practical sense, the most important miracle in the Bible, for here we see Christ re-making a man — re-creating a human being — like He wants to re-make and re-create all of us. Here we are shown in vivid detail the three things that must happen to all of us before our Lord can say to us what He said to Zacchaeus: "Today salvation has come to your house!"

Here Jesus shows us the three ways that God's grace is meant to work in our lives, to transform us, when we honestly accept this grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In each instance this grace works as "transforming power" as it saves us from the wrath of God and re-creates us into what we are meant to be.

### **I. From alienation to fellowship**

First, this "transforming power of Christ" changes us from alienation to fellowship with God, which means that the first point of this sermon is actually the same as point one in the sermon I preached 10 or 12 years ago: "Zacchaeus is up a tree!" Why do you think the Bible shows us this little, ambitious, hard-working man "up a tree?" Think about it and the answer is plain: the Bible wants to give us a graphic picture of what alienation from God really means! Alienation from God is like being "up a tree" while God is with the crowd below. Although Jesus, the Son of God, is in the midst of the

crowd below, Zacchaeus is completely out of touch with Him — because Zacchaeus is up a tree. Because Zacchaeus is up a tree he is alienated from the grace of God in Christ! In fact, Zacchaeus purposefully, by his own choice, when he heard that Jesus was coming his way, ran away from the Son of God and climbed up that tree. By his own decision he separated himself from God's grace in Christ. That's always what the Bible means by sin. That's man's common predicament: by our own choice we are all up a tree, separated from God's grace in Christ!

Even though Zacchaeus ran away from Jesus and got himself up a tree, the Son of God came to Zacchaeus! That's the Gospel! That's the good news! Even though we run away from Him and get ourselves up a tree, Christ comes to us with the grace of God! Jesus came to where Zacchaeus was, looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I want to dwell with you." That's verse 5. In verse 6 we are told that Zacchaeus responded with faith. The Bible says, "He came down and received him gladly!" That's the way salvation must always begin: It begins in fellowship with God in Christ! It begins in our response as our God speaks to us in Christ. It begins when we let Christ come to us and transform our alienation into fellowship!

Now, theologians and scholars usually call this transformation by high-sounding names like *justification* or *forgiveness* or *reconciliation*, but *justification* or *forgiveness* in common language simply means admission into this fellowship with God through Christ. And the first aspect of this fellowship with God in Christ is the overcoming of sin — the getting us down out of the tree and accepting us as special human beings where our Lord "wants to come and dwell." That's the first aspect of the transforming power of Christ: He transforms us from alienation to fellowship!

## II. From death to life

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The second aspect is this: He transforms us from death to life — from that which is dying to that which is alive and productive! Paul speaks of this transformation as being transformed from a *natural man* to a *spiritual man*, and the most complete description in the Bible of what this transformation means is in the 8th chapter of Romans. Paul says the end for the natural man, like all natural things, is death, for all of nature — all things created — are continually dying. The end for the spiritual man is life, for the Spirit of God is the Creator Himself and in Him and Him alone can we have eternal life!

In our Lord's encounter with Zacchaeus, Jesus is more interested in us grasping the practical side of this transformation. In the third chapter of John, in our Lord's encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus does deal with this other aspect of it; but here He shows us how this transformation from a natural to a spiritual person transforms our character right now! He is showing us that this fellowship with God in Christ is a life-giving fellowship

## NOTES

now! That through this fellowship we receive a new spirit and because of this new spirit we receive a new and different character!

Look at verse 8: Zacchaeus is a different man! Now, he has compassion for his fellow men. Now, he sacrifices to help others. Now, he is concerned about those he has wronged. This is a different person from the little, conniving, cheating, tax-collector who climbed that tree! This is always what happens when true salvation comes to our house!

This is not a change from the outside-in but it's a change from the inside-out! Jesus doesn't tell Zacchaeus to start acting right or to keep any religious rules or what his duty is as a Christian. Why, as a Jew, Zacchaeus was raised on that kind of legalism and moralism all of his life, and it hadn't done one bit of good. He was still an ornery rascal up a tree. All our Lord did was offer to dwell with him, and Zacchaeus accepted the offer. That's what the grace of God in Christ really is: it's the offer of our Lord to come and dwell with us and transform us. It's His offer to use our bodies as a temple for His Holy Spirit and thus give us a new character. When, through faith, we accept this offer, then the transformation of our character begins to take place from the inside-out. In Galatians, Paul explains this transformation with the metaphor of the fruit of the Spirit, by which he simply means that when we permit the Spirit of God in Christ to indwell us, His Spirit will just naturally produce the same fruit which we see in the character of Jesus, for it is His Spirit. Paul lists this fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Theologians and scholars like to call this transforming process by the high-sounding name of *sanctification*, but Jesus, who never gets hung up on labels, simply says, "Look at Zacchaeus if you want to see the transforming power of My indwelling Spirit! That's what I can do for you, too!" He wants us to see this truth from the standpoint of living life practically, not theoretically. He wants us to see what He can do for us when we've gotten ourselves up a tree because of our inordinate ambition and our hearts have been hardened by recklessly using others for self-gain. He wants us to see that when, through faith, we accept His offer to indwell us, He will transform us into a person who is not only pleasing to God, but who is also a person with whom we can live daily! Not only just live — but live joyfully! That's what it means to be transformed from death to life, from a natural person to a spiritual person. That is the second aspect of the transforming power of Christ!

### **III. From selfishness to productive stewardship**

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The third is: Christ transforms us from selfishness to productive stewardship. Look at Zacchaeus up the tree. Can you imagine a more perfect picture of selfishness? He's totally self-occupied. He's concerned only about himself. He is selfishness and self-centeredness personified.

He's a drone on God's kingdom, for all he has ever done is to take from it without ever giving to it.

Look at him after he accepts our Lord's offer to indwell him with the Holy Spirit: He is stewardship personified! He is the model of obedience to our Lord's command: *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things shall be yours as well!"* His first concern now is to be a good steward of what he has, trusting our Lord's promise:

*"Give and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap" (Lk 6:38).*

It was when Jesus saw in Zacchaeus this transformation from selfishness to productive stewardship that he said to him, *"Today salvation has come to your house!"* This is always the outward sign of genuine salvation: in response to what God has done for us in Christ, we become productive stewards for Him.

I think it's interesting and very relevant that in our *Journey Into Discipleship*, Jesus devotes the last two of His fifty discipleship lessons to this important subject of stewardship. By doing that He gives stewardship a very special emphasis. Here in this our 49th discipleship lesson, Jesus tells us:

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### **Discipleship Lesson #49**

**When we honestly accept God's offer of the transforming power of Christ that the result will be a life of stewardship.**

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That's our discipleship lesson here! Or, to say it another way, when we are truly in Christ and Christ is in us, then we honestly begin to live for God and His Kingdom, instead of living for self. The good news is you cannot outgive God! Do you really believe this? The truth is most Christians don't believe it, because they give only leftovers to God. For example, less than half of the families in our own church make a pledge to our church budget each year; and less than a tenth of our families honestly tithe; and our church is one of the most financially successful churches in America today!

No wonder that crime is running rampant in our streets and everywhere we look we're losing the battle with evil, for the Bible says God plans for His Kingdom to come on earth through the productive stewardship of His people! God's plan for saving this world is to transform people from selfishness to productive stewardship through the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The Bible also says, emphatically, that only productive stewards shall inherit the Kingdom of God.

Dear friends, God will not be mocked. There can be no salvation without a life of stewardship — they go together! Some of us have tried to substitute emotion for stewardship, others have tried to substitute formal religion for stewardship; and still others have tried to substitute piety and moralism

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for stewardship. The Bible says there is no substitute for stewardship, and when salvation comes to your house you will be transformed from a selfish person into a productive steward for our Lord!

I want to close today by telling you how this truth came home to me in a transforming way nearly 30 years ago. At the time, like Zacchaeus, I had been running away from the Lord as fast as I could run for about 12 years. One day He caught up with me and began to bless me, despite myself. I liked it, so I got back into the church and got more and more active. The only trouble was I was trying to substitute emotion, formal religion, being a churchman, piety, and morality for productive stewardship. Like Zacchaeus, I was a drone on God's Kingdom instead of a steward, but I didn't know it until one day the Lord "treed" me just like He "treed" Zacchaeus. Believe me, I know exactly how Zacchaeus felt sitting up that tree with the Lord looking up at him and asking him to come down. He was afraid to stay up the tree and he was scared to death of coming down.

Like Zacchaeus, I made a decision that day to be a productive steward for my Lord and sealed it by opening a new checking account I call "God's Fund" and making a covenant with my Lord to put 1/10th of all the money that comes into my hands into this account. This money is set aside for God and used exclusively for Him, His Church, and His Kingdom. I have kept that covenant faithfully for nearly 30 years now, and nothing in our life gives us more joy and excitement than deciding how we're going to use God's money for Him and His Kingdom. In fact, in recent years we've discovered that 1/10th is not enough because we have been so blessed.

The point I want to make is this: you can't out give God! Believe me, *"give and it will be given to you; pressed down ... running over."* You can't out give God! Do you really believe this?

God's greatest need in our world today is for people who do truly believe it and who will be genuine productive stewards for Him. I don't know how many of you are up that same tree, as our Lord calls you to go into partnership with Him today. One thing I'm sure of — and I end with this as I ended that sermon on Zacchaeus 10 or 12 years ago: The smartest thing all of us can do is to be obedient, come down, and go home with Him. Let's do what our Lord tells us to do, and not stop until we've gone all the way with Him!

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### **Discipleship Lesson #49**

**When we honestly accept God's offer of the transforming power of Christ that the result will be a life of stewardship.**

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## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #49?
2. From this discipleship lesson, how would you define “salvation?”
3. Explain what it means to be alienated from God.
4. God’s grace works in our lives as transforming power as it saves us from what two things?
5. The transforming power of Christ changes us from:  
alienation to \_\_\_\_\_,  
from death to \_\_\_\_\_,  
and from selfishness to \_\_\_\_\_.

## Search the Scriptures

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6. Read Colossians 3:1-10 and answer the following questions.  
What is the believer’s position in Christ?  
What is the believer to do as a result of this position?  
What characteristics describe the earthly nature?  
What things are we told to rid ourselves of?  
In whose image is the new self being renewed?

## Internalize God’s Word

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7. Read the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, and use these two passages as a basis for praying God’s Word. See *Steps in Praying God’s Word* in the Appendix.

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**Memory scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17**

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## Sermon 50: Journey Ends—Discipleship Begins!

Today, the journey we have been traveling together with our Lord for a year now — *The Journey Into Discipleship* — comes to an end. The scene for this 50th and final discipleship lesson is set in this opening verse of our Scripture, verse 11 and 12 of chapter 19 of Luke:

*“Because he was near to Jerusalem, and because the disciples supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately; He (Jesus) said therefore . . . ”*

In other words, because this would be our Lord’s last opportunity to instruct His disciples on *How to Be Disciples and Follow Him*, and because He didn’t want them just sitting around waiting but wanted them to get busy with the task ahead, He told them *“The Parable of the Pounds”* to emphasize that *Now the Journey Ends, Now Discipleship Must Begin!* In other words, the end of the journey — of the instruction time — signals the beginning of the time for them to act and actually be disciples! Why? Because this marks the end of our Lord’s earthly ministry to them. As He enters Jerusalem, bedlam surrounds Him, and then follows His Crucifixion, Resurrection and Glorification; so if His ministry is to be completed on earth the disciples must complete it for Him. The same is true for us! We, His disciples today, are His only Body on this earth and if His work is to be completed here we must get about the task He has assigned us of being disciples! On this journey He has taught us all we need to know in these 50 discipleship lessons; now, the rest is up to us! To motivate us to get moving He saved the most important lesson for the last, this *“Parable of the Pounds.”* Let me remind you of the highlights in this Parable.

Jesus says that a nobleman goes away to receive kingly power, but before leaving he calls ten of his servants and gives each the same thing: he gives each a pound. Then he says the same thing to each: *“Now, go use it for me until I return.”* In other words, he gives each servant an opportunity to go into partnership with him and rise from servanthood to stewardship – the opportunity to use the master’s resources but to be totally free in how the resources are used. Each has the opportunity to become a practicing steward for his master! Then when the nobleman does return with kingly power he has an accounting with each servant to whom he has given this opportunity. The first one comes and says to him:

*“Lord, your pound has made ten pounds more.”*

The king commissions him a faithful steward and gives him authority over ten cities. The next servant says to him:

*“Lord, your pound has made five pounds.”*

Scripture

Luke 19:11-27

Text

I tell you, that to every one who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

*Luke 19:26*

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The king commissions him a faithful steward and gives him authority over five cities. Then a third servant comes and says to the king:

*“Lord, here is your pound, which I kept laid away in a napkin; for I was afraid of you . . . .”* To which his Lord replies:

*“I will condemn you out of your own mouth, you wicked servant! [Why didn’t you put what I gave you to use?]”*

The king takes the pound from this unfaithful servant and gives it to the faithful steward who has made ten pounds. Since the point is made, there is no need to tell about each of the other seven servants, so Jesus concludes this parable with these penetrating words:

*“I tell you, that to every one who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (Lk 19:26).*

That is, true disciples who prove their discipleship by faithful stewardship will be entrusted with much more, but those who refuse to be faithful stewards of their trust shall lose it altogether! In the language of today, Jesus is saying to all would-be disciples something like this:

*“I am going away, like this nobleman, to receive kingly power, and like him I will give you — My disciples — a very precious gift when I go; but, also like him, I shall return as king in My glory, and then I will expect an accounting from you.”*

In-between the lines He is also saying this to us:

*“I have now taught you all that you need to know in order to be My disciples, except this final discipleship lesson, which is the most important lesson of all and I’ve saved it for the last. In this 50th discipleship lesson I will tell you the three things you must do in order to begin your life of discipleship now and to be faithful stewards for Me. These three things are basic, just as the 3 R’s are basic to learning; so remember them by thinking of them as “The 3 R’s of Discipleship.”*

## **I. Recognize**

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The first “R” is Recognize. Here, Jesus is telling us to recognize who we are! He is telling us to recognize the truth about ourselves! The first “R” is *Recognize! Recognize who you are!* I am convinced that it is this failure to recognize who we are that causes much hurt and impoverishment in life. Here in this great parable Jesus gives us two pictures – a picture of those who do recognize who they are, and a picture of those who do not recognize who they are. Those who do are rewarded, but those who do not are condemned to impoverished lives.

Throughout the Bible we are told that in the final analysis there are only two kinds of people inhabiting this earth. The Bible calls them

The people of God, and

The people of this world.

The Old Testament often refers to them as

The Israelites, that is, the people who are ruled by God, and  
The Gentiles, that is, the people of other nations who have not  
submitted to God's rule.

At other times the Old Testament calls them

The people of the Promise, and  
The Canaanites, who bow down to other gods.

In the Gospel of John, these two kinds of people are called

The children of light, and  
The children of darkness.

Paul, in his letters, usually calls them

Spiritual people, and  
Natural or worldly people.

Jesus usually refers to them as

Faithful stewards, and  
Wicked stewards.

No matter which terminology you use, all are referring to the same truth,  
which is this: the people on earth can be divided into two specific groups:

Those who recognize who they are as people of God and  
Those who do not recognize that they are God's people.

In our parable, this nobleman calls his servants to him and first of all tells  
them who they are! He tells them that they are his people and they are to  
represent him while he is away. They are to be his stewards. He will give  
them the resources and they are to speak and act for him while he is away.

Isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying to you and to me in Holy Scripture  
when He calls us to be His disciples? He is saying, "I must go away for  
awhile, so be sure you know who you are while I am gone! You are My  
people! My disciples! You are My stewards! You are here to represent Me  
on earth while I am gone. I give you My resources and authorize you to act  
for Me! As My disciples, you are My stewards. That's who you are!" Many  
people are living impoverished lives because they see themselves through  
the eyes of the world instead of through the eyes of Jesus.

The Bible says that Jesus came to reveal the truth about us, and only when  
we begin to see ourselves through His eyes can we really know the truth  
about ourselves. Only through His eyes can we ever see God's great love  
for us in giving us His only begotten Son. Only then can we see God's  
great victory for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Only then can  
we see God's great trust in us by creating His Church, and giving us the

stewardship over it, as His disciples. Only then can we truly appreciate our own value and see how God depends wholly upon us to do His work between the Ascension and the Return of Christ! Only then can we see our real importance as His people and as individual stewards for Him here on earth!

Yes, before we can ever be of any earthly use to our Lord we must first recognize who we are! We are His stewards, and we are here to serve our Lord by fulfilling the trust He has given us.

## II. Receive

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Secondly, we must Receive the gift He wants to give us in trust, so we can fulfill our calling to be His stewards on earth. That's the second of our three "R's": *Receive.* *Receive our Lord's gift to us!* Notice that the nobleman calls each would-be disciple to him and tells him who he is — a potential steward for him—and then he gives each one exactly the same gift in trust to use as stewards for him while he is gone.

Many Christians think of this "*Parable of the Pounds*" as nothing but a repeat of Jesus' "*Parable of the Talents*." Here is the real difference between the two: in "*The Parable of the Talents*" the Master gives his servants various and different talents; but here in this *Parable of the Pounds* he gives them all the exact same gift! The significance of the talents was the varying gifts we receive from God. He gives us the various gifts we need to do the job He has for us to do at the time. The significance of the exact same gift in this parable is to emphasize the one gift which our Lord gives to every disciple in common! It is to emphasize the one gift which He gives to all of us and which He expects us to use to serve Him!

Surely you have realized by now what this one gift is. Of course, it is His Holy Spirit! This is the one gift He promises to all of us. It is the one gift He says we must receive before we can be His disciples and be able to serve Him as faithful stewards! The Bible is clear that before we can be disciples that we must first receive His Holy Spirit! That's the second "R": *Receive His Holy Spirit!*

This is what Paul means when he writes to the Corinthians, saying: "*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.*" God doesn't give us all the same gifts, because we have different jobs to do for Him. But He does give us all His Holy Spirit because that is the only way we can ever do any job for Him. Without His Spirit the Bible says we do not belong to Christ. Without His Spirit the Bible says we cannot be spiritual men and women, people of God. Without His Spirit both discipleship and faithful stewardship are impossible. That is why, when Paul arrives in Ephesus and discovers twelve new converts to Christ, that his first question to them is:

*"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2).*

Since they had not received the Holy Spirit and could not be disciples until they did, Paul lays hands upon them and we are told in the 19th chapter of Acts that they do receive the Holy Spirit and immediately begin to manifest the same power that the original disciples received on the Day of Pentecost. They had to receive the Holy Spirit before they could fulfill their calling as disciples and be faithful stewards for our Lord. So do we!

This is what Jesus is asking all of His followers in this 50th discipleship lesson: “Have you received My greatest gift to you? Have you received the one gift I promise to all disciples? Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” In this parable, Jesus wants us to see that only by receiving this one gift can God ever use us in His work on earth, for only when we are controlled by God’s Spirit can we do His work on earth!

There are really only two kinds of people upon this earth: the people of God and the people of this world. There are people who have received God’s Holy Spirit and belong to Him and are thus controlled by His Spirit. There are people who have refused to receive His Holy Spirit and therefore cannot belong to Him, so they are controlled by the spirit of the world and therefore cannot be of any use to God as disciples.

*“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2a).*

Perhaps some must answer this question like the 12 Ephesians answered Paul:

*“No, we have never even heard that there was a Holy Spirit!” (Acts 19:2b).*

No doubt, several years ago, this would have been the reply of many of us as it is still the reply of many Christians today. But I sincerely doubt if any member of this church could honestly say that, for certainly those who have attended our church with any regularity at all for the past few years have heard of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

More than likely many must answer like the unfaithful servant in our parable, who went through the form of receiving our Lord’s best gift but who was controlled by a spirit of fear instead of by the Spirit of Christ. The Bible clearly states, that

*“God hath not given us (His disciples) a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim 1:7 KJV).*

### III. Risk

This brings us to the third and final truth in this great parable — the third “R”, which is *Risk*. Jesus says here that He gives us His Holy Spirit while He is away so we will have the courage to risk all for Him! The world’s spirit — the spirit of fear — binds us and keeps us from risking for Him; but the Holy Spirit frees us and empowers us to step out on faith and risk

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all for Him as His faithful steward. This is our Lord's Word to His disciples of every age. This is the main point of this parable. This is the point that really separates the men from the boys.

This is the way Jesus judges whether we really belong to Him or not:

- Those who are guided by His Holy Spirit are not afraid to risk all for Him, so they are rewarded with greater and more exciting opportunities, so that He can get His work done here on earth.
- \* Those who are guided by the spirit of the world — the spirit of fear — are bound and thus afraid to risk what they have for Him, so they are cursed and condemned to impoverishment and unable to be His disciples.

The 50th and final discipleship lesson our Lord has for us in our *Journey Into Discipleship* is this:

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### **Discipleship Lesson #50**

**To be disciples for our Lord we must first be faithful stewards by risking what we have for Him!**

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If we are afraid to risk, He can do nothing for us, and we will lose the greatest gift of all—the indwelling of His Holy Spirit—because we don't use it. If we risk what we have for Him, He will bless us with even greater gifts and more opportunities as He gives us more of Himself. Hear our text again:

*"I tell you, that to everyone who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Lk 19:26).*

## Explore the Sermon

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1. What is Discipleship Lesson #50?
2. What are the 3 R's of discipleship mentioned in this discipleship lesson?

## Search the Scriptures

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3. Look up the following scripture references concerning these 3 R's and explain what you learn concerning each of these 3 R's.
  - (a) 1 Peter 2:9-10; Romans 12:5
  - (b) Acts 1:8; Romans 8:15-16
  - (c) Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:9; Matthew 10:8

## Internalize God's Word

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4. Ask God to help you discover the answers to these questions:

Do I recognize who I am? Then, who am I?

According to Acts 2:38, what must I do to receive the Holy Spirit?

Have I received the Holy Spirit?

If I am not experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit the third point in this sermon may explain the reason. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, what am I risking for Him?

According to Matthew 28:19-20, what does Jesus Christ call me as a disciple to do?

As a disciple who has learned discipleship on a journey with the Master, read again Jesus words to you as He breathes into you His Holy Spirit — John 20:21-23. What are you now enabled to do for those He gives you to disciple?

Using Steps in *Praying God's Word* in the Appendix, make this scripture the basis for your prayer.

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**Memory scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:2**

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## Notes

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Journey Into Discipleship

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# 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.

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**Seven verbs: Read Pray Relax Recall Enter Experience Express**

Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #41**

Genuine discipleship is always the response of a grateful spirit for what God has done for us in Christ.

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #42**

A disciple must be accountable and ready for Judgment Day.

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #43**

Persistent prayer keeps a disciple from losing heart and falling away.

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #44**

To have the eyes of a disciple, we must see ourselves honestly; we must see the best in others; we must see God as a God of grace. We must see with the eyes of Jesus.

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #45**

Discipleship begins with childlikeness, but it must go on to Christlikeness as we grow into full maturity in Christ!

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #46**

Discipleship is commitment and commitment is stewardship and stewardship is the way we give ourselves to God and the way we make it possible for God to give Himself to us!

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #47**

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.  
(Mt 16:24-25)

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #48**

A disciple moves out of darkness through repentance, and stays in the light through living a life of faith.

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #49**

When we honestly accept God's offer of the transforming power of Christ that the result will be a life of stewardship.

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Journey Into Discipleship

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**Discipleship Lesson #50**

To be disciples for our Lord we must first be faithful stewards by risking what we have for Him!

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**Sermon 43**  
**Jeremiah 33:3**

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'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

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**Sermon 42**  
**2 Corinthians 5:15**

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And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

(NIV, ©2011)

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**Sermon 41**  
**Psalms 103:1-5**

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Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

(NIV, ©2011)

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**Sermon 46**  
**Luke 6:38**

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"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."

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**Sermon 45**  
**2 Peter 3:18**

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But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

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**Sermon 44**  
**Romans 11:33-36**

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

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?"

For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

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**Sermon 49**  
**2 Corinthians 5:17**

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

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**Sermon 48**  
**1 John 1:7**

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But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

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**Sermon 47**  
**Ephesians 4:22-24**

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You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

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**Sermon 50**  
**1 Corinthians 4:2**

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Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

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