

Daily God Walk

**Commands of
Christ**

And His Apostles

Volume Two

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV). All other translations used will be credited using these abbreviations:
(KJV) – King James Version
(NKJV) – New King James Version
(TLB) – The Living Bible
(TM) – The Message
(AMP) – The Amplified Bible

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Day One

Honor Your Parents

Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother... But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. - Matthew 15:3-6

Honor and respect are pretty big issues in the Bible. We are taught that we are to honor our parents and we are to honor those who have authority over us. In fact, some who have studied the Old Testament law have concluded that it is all about honor and respect.

When we look closely at the 10 Commandments and the rest of the law we can see that the entire revelation of God is teaching us to honor and respect the Lord God, respect his creation and respect our fellow man. When we do that we live in harmony with God, nature and man. When we don't do that we get everything out of balance.

There is a blessing in giving honor to those the Bible tells us to honor. In fact Apostle Paul reminds us that the command to honor our father and mother is the first command with a promise attached to it. Do you remember what that promise is? It is found in Exodus 20:12: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

The Lord is saying that if we give honor to our parents, including all in the older generation, and by

extension, all those who are in authority over us, he will give us long life in the place where he puts us.

If you haven't spoken to your parents in a while, give them a call and share your life with them. If your parents are deceased then share with someone your gratefulness for what God has brought into your life.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the parents who raised me. Amen.

Message: Give honor to our parents, including all in the older generation, and by extension, all those who are in authority over us, and God will give us long life in the place where he puts us.

Affirmation: I have respect and give honor to those who are in authority over me and to those who have gone before me.

Reflection: Do a little research into the law God gave Moses as is recorded in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Can you see how that the law, including the 10 Commandments, was given to give us guidelines in how we are to respect God, creation and our fellow human beings? Give that some thought.

My Thoughts:

Day Two

Christ Calls, "Follow Me"

Jesus said to them, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees... They understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. - Matthew 16:6-12

"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. - Luke 12:1

There are many smooth talking teachers who have a measure of truth but all too often when we take a closer look at what they are teaching we can not only see the error in what they teach but we can see the inconsistencies in their life.

What was it in the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees that Jesus was warning about? And what is it that makes hypocrites out of them? Could it be that the traditions they had built around the law had become so cumbersome that even the leaders could not keep them?

In Luke chapter 11 leading up to the warning against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees Jesus gave a few very severe reprimands to both the Pharisees and the Scribes. He declares, "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone."

He goes on to say, "And you experts in the law, woe to you because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."

We must not only be careful not to fall victim of such teachers but we must also be careful that we do not make the walk of faith so difficult that those we teach cannot reach the standard we set. And we must be doubly careful that we don't cover our own inconsistencies with justifications we do not allow others - that is what made hypocrites of the Pharisees.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the wisdom to discern truth and error and the courage to reject the error and stand firm in the truth. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Message: We must be careful that we do not make the walk of faith so difficult that those we teach cannot reach the standard we set. And we must be doubly careful that we don't cover our own inconsistencies with justifications we do not allow others - that is what made hypocrites of the Pharisees.

Affirmation: I do not set a standard for others that I have not first lived and if it is not clearly stated in the Word of God I do not set it up as a measure of commitment.

Reflection: The Pharisees were those who were looked to by the common people as spiritual leaders and Jesus called them hypocrites. Why do you suppose he did that? Give some careful thought to that then examine yourself in the same light.

My Thoughts:

Day Three

Take Up the Cross of Self-Denial

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

- Luke 9:23-24

Surveys have shown that over 2 billion people in this world claim to be Christian, but when we look at New Testament Christianity we begin to wonder just how many are truly Christian. Far too many who have Christian checked in the religion column have not been exposed to what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Jesus had just told his disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (v22). It is in this setting that he declares, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

The call of Christ is not to glory and prosperity but it is to a life committed to daily denying self and taking the cross of Christian responsibility. More believers in the Christ need to realize that we are not called to faith in Christ so that we can sit around singing “Come Ba Ya” as we wait for his return.

He has challenged us to be aware of the price he must pay to secure this opportunity for all those who would follow him and the challenge we all must face to deny ourselves and follow him.

What does it mean to deny ourselves? Does that mean we must go to a monastery in a remote place and devote ourselves to a life of solitude and reflection? I don't think so. If we want to know what it means to deny ourselves we must look at Christ.

Even in the face of rejection and facing death, he continued to preach the message of the kingdom of God. He knew the price he would pay to spread the good news and he was willing to pay it. That is what we are called to as those who call ourselves Christian. Not the cross of Calvary but the cross of daily living out the principles of the kingdom and sharing those with others.

Prayer: Grant me the grace to deny myself and take up my cross.

Message: How do we “take up our cross?” It is a challenge to deny ourselves and follow him. What does it mean to deny ourselves? If we want to know what it means to deny ourselves we must look at Christ.

Affirmation: Jesus is my example of how I must put my own will aside and be committed to the will of the Father. That is my cross of self-denial.

Reflection: Denial of our self is the biggest challenge we face in our journey of faith. We must first be committed to the will of the Father. Then, to follow the Father we must deny our own self-will. That is our challenge today.

My Thoughts:

Day Four

Value of the Young and the Weak

See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. - Matthew 18:10

The first 15 verses of this chapter frame an interesting concept. The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (v1).

Jesus gave an interesting answer to that question. "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'" (v2-4). That wasn't the answer his disciples expected.

He then explains that anyone who offends one of the weak ones will suffer sorely (v6). In fact he goes on to say that we must be careful that our hands or eyes don't lead us to cause an offense against one of those most easily offended and it would be better to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye and still enter the kingdom than it would be to enter into hell with all of our faculties (v7-9).

Jesus is explaining that we must become as children in faith and simplicity and we are not to look down on those who are of less standing in life than we are.

When we look at the question Jesus is answering ("Who is the greatest in the kingdom?") he seems to be saying, "It's not if you will be the *greatest*, it is first if you will *be* in the kingdom, and then if you are, what should be your attitude toward others."

He concludes this teaching by telling the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus is establishing the value of just one of the weak ones who is lost and wandering. On the one hand he is calling us to be as children and on the other hand he is calling us to be responsible for those who are lost and wandering.

If we want a place in the kingdom we must become as children in faith and simplicity and we must become diligent as a shepherd who watches over those weak ones. Are you up to the task? We can do it through faith in Christ and Holy Spirit power.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to become as a child. Amen.

Message: If we want a place in the kingdom we must become as children in faith and simplicity and we must become diligent as a shepherd who watches over those weak ones. Are you up to the task? We can do it through faith in Christ and Holy Spirit power.

Affirmation: As a shepherd I guard the weak ones; as a follower of Christ I come as a child.

Reflection: The first 15 verses of Matthew 18 have some power packed concepts. Give some careful thought to these ideas:

- How does one come to Christ as a child?
- Who are the weak ones and how do I avoid offending them?
- What is my responsibility as a shepherd?

My Thoughts:

Day Five

The Cost of Unforgiveness

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. - Matthew 18:15

When someone has offended us we often think of the damage that the offensive act causes us, but we don't often think of the damage caused by carrying the offense in our heart and not having a spirit of forgiveness. Often Unforgiveness is much more damaging to us than the offense itself.

In a writing on the subject of forgiveness a well known Bible teacher gives four things that happen when we don't forgive others:

1. **We are not forgiven.** In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus tells us that if we don't forgive others we will not be forgiven.
2. **We are tormented.** Matthew 18:32-35 tells the story of a man forgiven of a great debt but he wouldn't forgive one who owed him a small debt. Because of that the man he owed the debt to turned him over to the tormenters. The message is that when we don't forgive that unforgiveness becomes a torment to us.
3. **We are defiled.** Hebrews 12:14-5 tells us, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Unforgiveness produces bitterness and defiles us.

4. **We damage our health.** Medical science has shown that there are numerous physical disorders which can be the result of the stress bitterness places on our body: Arthritis, heart condition, Asthma and many more.

Are you convinced yet? We pay the price for unforgiveness and the person who caused the offense is not affected at all. If you are carrying unforgiveness against an offender I strongly recommend that you seek God until your heart is humbled toward that person and you can forgive them so that your peace is restored.

Prayer: Lord, it isn't easy to forgive those who do hurtful things to me, but grant me the grace to forgive so I do not bear the consequences of unforgiveness.

Message: We pay the price for unforgiveness and the person who caused the offense is not affected at all. If you are carrying unforgiveness against an offender I strongly recommend that you seek God until your heart is humbled toward that person and you can forgive them so that your peace is restored.

Affirmation: I have purposed to not carry unforgiveness toward others because it is too heavy a load for me to bear.

Reflection: Carefully consider the four effects of unforgiveness given in this devotion and examine how your own life may have been affected by harboring unforgiveness.

My Thoughts:

Day Six

Greed is the Root of Much Evil

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

- Luke 12:13-15

Families have been divided over an inheritance for centuries. It is a sad thing that so often at the loss of a loved one the grief is tainted by greed. I remember following one story where a brother became so upset over the way the inheritance was divided that he actually killed his brother and is now in prison.

It isn’t only true about inheritance but Jesus goes on to give a parable of a man who was enjoying prosperity. Each year his crops did well so he tore down his barns to build bigger barns to hold his wealth. He gave no thought to others or to his own soul; he only thought about how he could accumulate wealth. He said to himself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (v19).

Jesus concludes this parable by saying, “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God”

Some people live for this life alone without realizing that everything they do in this life is going to affect the quality of their life in eternity. Paul wrote in

Romans, “God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger (Romans 2:6-8).

We would all do well to remember the old verse, “Only one life, ‘twill some be passed. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to serve you and not to succumb to the spirit of greed. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: Paul wrote in Romans, “God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger (Romans 2:6-8).

Affirmation: I am conscious of my attitude toward things in this world and I am committed to putting the kingdom of God first because I know he will add everything to my life that I need.

Reflection: The story of the wealthy man who was only concerned about gathering more wealth addresses the question of what gives a person security. If our hope, or security is based in this world system then how fragile is that hope?

My Thoughts:

Day Seven

Christ Calls for Servant Leaders

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles Lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” - Matthew 20:25-28

There are many models for evangelism among believers today, but the most successful are those built around serving the ones they are evangelizing.

A church in Los Angeles developed an outreach they called “adopt a block.” They would choose a block in the area of their church and begin a project of cleaning it up. They would ask the residents if there was anything they could do for them. It was a poor neighborhood with much need. As they served that neighborhood many people were added to the kingdom.

The best workplace evangelist I know is my wife. She is a true servant evangelist. She overheard one woman in her workplace comment that she loved dark chocolate. One morning when this woman arrived at work there was a dark chocolate candy bar on her desk. That candy bar opened a friendship which led to that woman giving her heart to Christ.

I know Jesus wasn't primarily referring to evangelism when he spoke to his disciples about servant leadership, but the application is very appropriate. He spoke of the way of the Gentiles, or simply the world around us today, and indicated they

lead by lording it over people. He contrasts that style of leading with his own life.

When we lead people by serving them we can lead them to the kingdom of God. That is what Jesus did. The people came to him because of how he served them. He healed them; he fed them; he comforted them and he gave them hope.

Serving others will give us the opportunity to lead them into the kingdom of God. If we desire to be great in God's kingdom then we must master the art of serving others.

Prayer: God, grant me the grace to be a servant leader. Amen.

Message: Serving others will give us the opportunity to lead them into the kingdom of God. If we desire to be great in God's kingdom then we must master the art of serving others.

Affirmation: My desire is to be effective in leading people into the kingdom of God and I am willing to serve in whatever way I can to facilitate that happening.

Reflection: Is it wrong to desire a leadership role in God's service? The answer to that question depends on motivation. What motivates one to be a leader? Is it to have a better position, or is it to be a more effective servant? Can you explain the difference?

My Thoughts:

Day Eight

Becoming a House of Prayer

Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers.” – Luke 19:45-47

Jesus had just ridden into Jerusalem in what has been called his triumphal entry. His disciples had gotten him a young donkey to ride and as he neared Jerusalem the people threw their garments on the ground before him and waving palm branches they cried out, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

As he neared Jerusalem he looked down upon the city and wept because he knew that the leaders of their religion would not receive him and they were missing their hour of visitation. As he wept he cried out, “If you, even you had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes” (v42).

It was in this frame of mind that Jesus entered the temple and was moved by what he saw there. The temple was built to be the house of God. It would be the place where people would come in humility to make offering to the Lord God, seeking his forgiveness and his righteousness.

What he found there was money merchants charging high fees to change their money into temple currency and other merchants taking advantage of those who had traveled far on a pilgrimage to the temple. They were selling animals for sacrifice at exorbitant prices thereby cheating the people. Jesus

became so furious at the pollution of the sacred in the temple that he drove those hypocrites from the temple.

Today we have churches, but the true house of God is the temple of our heart. There is a warning in this passage that we must be careful so that we do not allow the same spirit of avarice into our hearts that was in the temple of Jerusalem. We must be careful to make our temple a place of humble prayer and submission to God.

Prayer: Lord, Help me to make my heart a temple of prayer.

Message: There is a warning in this passage that we must be careful so that we do not allow the same spirit of avarice into our hearts that was in the temple of Jerusalem. We must be careful to make our temple a place of humble prayer and submission to God.

Affirmation: The temple of God is now in the heart of man. I must keep my temple in such a way that God feels welcome there.

Reflection: The merchants in the temple area were performing a service for those who came to worship. Why do you think Jesus was offended by them? Is there any parallel to some in the church today?

My Thoughts:

Day Nine

Ask in Faith

I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

- Matthew 21:21-22

This is one of the most powerful, yet perplexing promises of Jesus. The promise is that faith can move mountains; the perplexity is that we don't see many mountains moved.

I live in Lake County, California. Clearlake is just about 150 yards from my front door. Clearlake is surrounded by mountains and it is beautiful. When I look at these massive structures of rock and dirt topped with trees, I will confess, I do not have the faith to move even a little bit of these mountains. I think that is true for most of us, and I'm not sure Jesus actually meant for us to move literal mountains.

The message, though, seems to be that faith in God opens the door for the impossible to become probable. Before you get your faith in gear be aware that there are many people preaching a faith message that is very shallow and in some cases in gross error.

The purpose of the power of faith is to fulfill the will of God on earth for his kingdom. It is not to turn God into a celestial butler just waiting for our every request for comfort and luxury.

If we look at the story which stimulated these words of Christ we will perhaps see its meaning. First, Jesus was hungry. The Lord was looking for food. He came to

a fig tree which was created to produce food. The tree was barren - it wasn't doing what it was created to do. When Jesus realized the tree was barren he cursed the tree to die, and it did.

Then Jesus told his disciples they would have the same power if they believed. If we are to take this story at face value it looks like the mountain might just be unbelief, and may even be unbelievers. That is a scary thought. It might be a good idea to examine ourselves to see if we are a mountain which needs to be moved.

Prayer: Lord, grant me grace that I might live to fulfill your will.

Message: If we are to take this story at face value it looks like the mountain might just be unbelief, and may even be unbelievers. That is a scary thought. It might be a good idea to examine ourselves to see if we are a mountain which needs to be moved.

Affirmation: "Lord, I believe; help me in my unbelief."

Reflection: We all struggle with the tension that is formed between what we actually believe and what we want to believe. How can we develop our faith so that we truly believe God for those things that are humanly impossible in our life?

My Thoughts:

Day Ten

Have Compassion for People of Need

When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. - Luke 14:13-14

My wife and I started our ministry together over 20 years ago. We were led to minister to people of need. Our vision was that we would find people who were hurting and whose lives were messed up, lead them to Christ, then help them become established in local churches.

The first part of that vision worked well. We worked one large apartment complex and at one time, counting adults and children, we were ministering to over 100 people. Our problem came when we began trying to get local churches involved. Even though from the pulpit they would tell the congregation to reach out to the needy they weren't prepared to minister to their needs.

Our work in the apartment complex eventually led to being given the use of a 200 room motel which we used as a transitional project for homeless families. It didn't appear that these folks were welcome in other churches so we started a church for them to attend. What is interesting is that we would have pastors tell us they were so glad we were working with "those people" because someone had to reach them. What they meant was they were relieved that we were doing it so they wouldn't feel so guilty about not doing it themselves.

In verse 12 of this passage Jesus says, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends,

your brothers or relatives, or your neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid." A parallel thought to that might be, "Don't use all of your efforts as a church to enhance your relationship with the congregation because they will give good offerings and you will have received your reward for your service." Oh, that hurt.

It is time for us as believers in Christ to examine how we invest our time, talent and treasure. Are we using all of our resources to enhance our fellowship with other believers, or are we actually investing in the poor, crippled, lame, blind, and I will add; the homeless, addicted, and single parents?

Prayer: Lord, I enjoy fellowship with my friends, but grant me the grace to invest in those who most need kingdom resources. I ask In Jesus name.

Message: It is time for us as believers in Christ to examine how we invest our time, talent and treasure. Ask yourself what percentage of your time and resources you invest in the lost.

Affirmation: The question I am praying about is simply, "Am I investing my time, talent and resources for the purposes to which I was given them?"

Reflection: The Scripture passage and this devotion certainly calls us to examine how we are investing our time, talent and treasure. Here is a simple exercise: Make a list of things you are doing to reach others for Christ, then make a list of things you are doing that benefit you.

My Thoughts:

Day Eleven

Strangers in This World's Kingdoms

“Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

- Matthew 22:19-21

The Pharisees came to Jesus asking whether they should pay taxes to Caesar or not. The question was about more than taxes and was asked to trick Jesus into saying something that would offend the prevailing government or that would compromise his position with the Jews.

Jesus perceived their purpose and made a very cogent point about co-existing with an earthly kingdom. He basically said the inscription on the coins shows who is owed tribute. The question was about taxes, but there is a larger question to be asked.

How should we be living in this world? We are strangers waiting to be taken to our true home (Hebrews 11:13). All that is in this world from the money to the mountains is temporary. This entire world of physical existence will at some point pass away, but we who have been born into the kingdom of God will outlive all the kingdoms of this world. However, we do owe certain courtesies and obligations to the world which gives us residence.

As long as we are in this world we are guests and should treat all that is in it with respect as we would expect guests in our home to treat us. There is a warning, however, that we do not become so comfortable with the kingdoms of this world that we

forget we are from another world and we are bound to return to that world.

This world needs government to prevent chaos and we must respect that. Governments of this world need to charge taxes so they can operate and we need to respect that. We also must keep in mind that even though we are guests here we cannot allow the way this world thinks and its systems to become important in our life. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's - but soul, body, mind and spirit are to be given to God.

Prayer: Grant me the grace to give to the world what is theirs and to give to you what is yours, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Message: As long as we are in this world we are guests and should treat all that is in it with respect as we would expect guests in our home to treat us. We must be careful that we do not become so comfortable with the kingdoms of this world that we forget we are from another world and we just passing through this world.

Affirmation: I am a visiting alien in this world and though I respect this world system and abide by the rules, I know my citizenship is in another kingdom.

Reflection: How do we exist in this world system while being committed to God's world and his kingdom? Are we to obey the laws of our land? What if those laws violate our conscience? Give some thought to how you can live in this world without being affect by it.

My Thoughts:

Day Twelve

Love is the Greatest Commandment

The most important [commandment],” answered Jesus, “Is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love our neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these. - Mark 12:29-31

We have a problem with love and the reason is that it runs counter to our basic nature. When we realize that love is all about care and concern for others and our natural position is to consider others in light of how my care for them will affect me, then we can begin to understand our problem.

Jesus was quoting from the *Shema*, which is what Jews call the command of Deuteronomy 6:4. For centuries the Jews had followed the instruction of Moses to, “Tie [these words] as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:8-9). They were to keep this command ever before themselves so they would remember to love their God.

However, they found it much easier to love with religious devotion than to love him from the heart with all of their being. Yet, that is what Jesus was calling for.

One test of whether a person loved God in the way that Jesus was calling them to love him was in the way they treated others. Jesus put loving our neighbor on the par with loving God. When asked who was a neighbor Jesus responded with the story we commonly

call The Good Samaritan. That story is found in Luke chapter 10 and emphasizes the point that our neighbor is anyone who is in need, even if that person is of another race or religion.

We show the world that we love God every Sunday morning, but do we show it through the week by loving our neighbor? In Matthew's rendering of this passage he says, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:40).

How important is it to love in this way? It is the very essence of what it means to be a Christian.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love and my neighbor as I should.

Message: We show the world that we love God every Sunday morning, but do we show it through the week by loving our neighbor? In Matthew's rendering of this passage he says, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:40). How important is it to love in this way? It is the very essence of what it means to be a Christian.

Affirmation: My love for God is shown by how I love others. My love for God is mirrored in my love for others and how I give myself for them.

Reflection: How important is it to love others as God loves them? Jesus told us that loving God and loving others is the very essence of God's law. Consider how your life demonstrates love for God and others.

My Thoughts:

Day Thirteen

Love Your Neighbor – It's God's Law

Love your neighbor as yourself – Matthew 22:39

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. – Romans 13:10

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. – Romans 15:1-2

We talk a good bit about loving our neighbor, but we sometimes wonder what it means love them. Jesus said to love our neighbor as ourselves, and that is a pretty tall order. If we love our neighbor as ourselves does that mean we will make sure that they eat at least as good as we do? Does it mean that we will make sure their clothes are as good as ours? What does it mean?

Paul helps us understand in the two verses in our scripture reading found in Romans. He makes an interesting observation in the 13:10 passage, “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” He is actually saying that when we love God’s way we are fulfilling the requirements of the law. If that is true then we could also conclude that we have not fulfilled God’s law if we do not love our neighbor.

In the Romans 15 passage he reminds us that when we love our neighbor we will please them rather than please ourselves. I suppose we could carry that to extreme and become servant to our neighbor in order to see that his every need is met, but would that be too far off the mark of what Paul is saying?

The idea which seems to be coming across is that we should live in such a way as to be aware of those around us and their needs. All of us are limited in our resources, but we are not limited in the love of God. When we realize our responsibility to serve those whose needs are greater than our own then we tap into supernatural resources.

It might be time to do a personal inventory just to see if we really do love our neighbor as ourselves.

Prayer: Lord, help me to submit to your love so that I will think of others first. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: The idea which seems to be coming across is that we should live in such a way as to be aware of those around us and their needs. All of us are limited in our resources, but we are not limited in the love of God. When we realize our responsibility to serve those whose needs are greater than our own then we tap into supernatural resources.

Affirmation: I am committed to serving God through serving others.

Reflection: In our verses from Romans in this devotion Paul gives us some insight into what it means to love our neighbor. What was he addressing when he wrote, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak"?

My Thoughts:

Day Fourteen

Stay Alert – He’s Coming Back

Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: **If the owner of the house had known** what time of night the thief was coming, **he would have kept watch** and would not have let his house be broken into. **So you also must be ready**, because the **Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.** - Matthew 24:42-44

It has been a long time since he left, but rest assured he is coming back. Even while he was warning his followers to be prepared for his return he was also warning that he would be gone a long time.

Jesus continues his teaching on being prepared for his return in verse 48 when he mentions servants who begin misbehaving when they realize their master will not be returning for a long time. Matthew 25 gives us the parable of the three servants the master had invested some money. In that parable Jesus said, “After a long time the master of those servants returned.”

We are to remain watchful at all times because we not only do not know the time of his return, but we do not know when he will call us personally. We live in a body that Paul calls a tent. It is just a temporary dwelling until the day this body, or tent, is discarded and we take up abode in our heavenly, eternal home.

As Jesus is warning his followers to be watchful and be prepared for his return he tells of unfaithful servants who do not expect their master so they begin to misbehave doing things they know they should not do. “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of” (v50).

In times past people wrote songs which reflected their hope of Christ's return. There was "I'll Fly Away," "The Sweet By and By," and "Mansion Over the Hilltop," along with many more. Today there is less talk about heaven and more talk of the here and now. We must live in such a way that we are not seduced into complacency and be overcome with world causing us to not be looking for him when he returns.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be watching and praying for your return.

Message: We must live in such a way that we are not seduced into complacency and be overcome with world causing us to not be looking for him when he returns.

Affirmation: I ever keep before the idea that this world is not my home I'm just passing through and I will be looking for him when he returns.

Reflection: If the man of the house had known when his home would be invaded he would have been ready for it. That is the example Jesus gives of when he returns. What should we as believers do to be certain we are prepared for him to return?

My Thoughts:

Day Fifteen

Communion – Sign of the New Covenant

While they were eating Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

– Matthew 24:25-28

There are many opinions concerning receiving the last supper. Some traditions teach that when the bread and the drink enter the mouth of the recipient it becomes the actual blood and body of Christ. Some traditions believe it is necessary to receive the communion to be saved. There are some whose tradition is that the communion is spiritually observed and not physically taken at all. The most common protestant position is that receiving the communion memorializes the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ for the salvation of all who believe in him.

Whatever our position on any of the traditions of celebrating the Last Supper, we all agree that at this event Christ was making the statement that his broken body and shed blood are elements of the new covenant God is making with mankind. That is the covenant of salvation by grace through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ of God.

In Luke’s rendering of this event he tells us that Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Jesus was giving the church a reference point to remember the purpose of his suffering and death on the cross.

It is because of the price paid by our Lord that the new covenant was established and the door to heaven is opened to all who will enter in. That is what we should be remembering when we partake of the communion.

However you commemorate the Last Supper do it in memory of the one who paid the ultimate price to give you, me and the world an opportunity to have eternal life.

Prayer: Father God, I thank you for the gift of salvation receive through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of the Christ.

Message: It is because of the price paid by our Lord that the new covenant was established and the door to heaven is opened to all who will enter in. That is what we should be remembering when we partake of the communion.

Affirmation: I understand that receiving the Lord's Supper is more than an act of piety. It is a focus point for remembering the broken body and shed blood of Jesus our Lord.

Reflection: Receiving communion is celebrated in various ways and each tradition has good reasons for their particular manner of receiving it. Give some thought to the meaning of your tradition of receiving the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Christ. Reflect on the meaning of his blood being the blood of a new covenant.

My Thoughts:

Day Sixteen

You Must Be Born Again!

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'you must be born again.'" - John 3:3-7

The bottom line of the Christian message is simply this: You must be born again. I think many of those who are critical of Christianity do not get that point. To those outside of the faith Christianity is just another set of religious creeds.

Unfortunately, many who call themselves Christian also believe that being Christian is just a matter of embracing a particular set of creeds and doctrine. All who believe that have missed the point entirely. People are not Christian because they were born into a Christian family, or because they join a church.

The Scripture is very clear on how one becomes a believer in Christ and thereby becoming Christian. Paul writes in Romans ten, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Believing that Christ rose from the dead is more than a statement of fact. It is believing in all that comes in the package of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Paul tells us in Romans six that we are buried with Christ in baptism and just as Christ

rose from the grave to new life so we rise from the waters of baptism to live a new life - a born again life.

We were born with a nature which drove us to sin and our sins built a barrier between us and Christ. The remedy is to re-do our birth, but this time to be born in the Spirit instead of in the flesh. Thank God that we are born again after the nature of God and because of that we have hope in this life and the life to come.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the opportunity to have new life.

Message: Believing that Christ rose from the dead is more than a statement of fact. It is believing in all that comes in the package of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

Affirmation: I heard the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. I have believed and embraced that message. I have now been born again, born of His Spirit.

Reflection: We must be careful to understand that being a Christian is about more than just believing a doctrine, but it is primarily about the inner change which takes place when we have fully embraced Christ and have committed our life to him. How would you explain the process of becoming Christian?

My Thoughts:

Day Seventeen

Stay in the Vine

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. - John 15:5

Jesus is comparing our relationship to him with a vine which produces good fruit. As Jesus is explaining this relationship we are to have with him we can imagine a vineyard with many grape vines and we can see the vineyard worker as he goes from vine to vine examining which ones need to be pruned back so they can grow fresh branches so they will produce much fruit.

The Father is the keeper of the vineyard and he is constantly examining which of the branches should be kept in the vine and which should be cut off the vine. Jesus says that if we remain in the vine he will remain in us. However, it is the Father who chooses which branches will be pruned.

Could he be saying that the choice of whether we remain in the vine is not ours to make but the Father's? If it is the Father's choice, what are the factors which are considered in making his decision? In verse two Jesus says the Father cuts off branches which don't bear fruit. In verse seven Jesus tells us that if his words remain in us then we remain in the vine.

There seems to be a correlation between fruitfulness and obeying the words of Christ. In verse ten Jesus says, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love." That seems pretty straight forward. We must remain in the vine if the Spirit-life blood is to flow through and we remain in the vine by obey the

commands of Christ. The test of whether we are obeying Christ is whether we are producing fruit.

Jesus concludes this teaching by saying, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other” (verse 16-17).

We are chosen to bear fruit and to be favored by our Father in heaven. Are you bearing much fruit?

Prayer: Jesus, help me obey your words that I might stay in the vine and bear much fruit. In Your name. Amen.

Message: There seems to be a correlation between fruitfulness and obeying the words of Christ. In verse ten Jesus says, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love.” That seems pretty straight forward. We must remain in the vine if the Spirit-life blood is to flow through and we remain in the vine by obey the commands of Christ. The test of whether we are obeying Christ is whether we are producing fruit.

Affirmation: Because I have chosen to be obedient to Christ I am bearing spiritual fruit and I remain in the vine.

Reflection: The vine itself is the life-flow. The life-flow of Holy Spirit can only continue in us as we stay connected to the vine. Give some thought to how you must live to continue in the vine.

My Thoughts:

Day Eighteen

Watch and Pray

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

- Mark 14:24-25

Among the more difficult disciplines of our faith life is to maintain a consistent time of intimate prayer. Jesus had gone a little ways off to pray and had told his disciples to pray until he returned. In about an hour he went over to where they were and found them asleep. In grief he asks, “Could you not keep watch for one hour?”

I cannot tell you the times I have purposed to pray for a specific period of time and in just a few minutes found myself falling asleep. I don't think I am a rare exception, in fact, most of the people I talk to about this has the same problem.

Most of us, it seems, have little experience in protracted times of prayer. If we pray consistently at all it is usually just a few minutes then we are off to other tasks. After all, how long does it take ask God for our needs?

It seems that Jesus was asking for more than a casual prayer. He indicates that he expected they would still be praying when he returned after being gone for an hour. Think about it: What are we going to say to God for an hour? Yet that was what he expected from them that night.

I was once teaching a series of lessons on how to pray for an hour. A few weeks into the lessons an elderly lady gave a testimony of how her prayer life had changed. She said in all of her life she had not been able to pray more than five minutes at a time and the thought of praying for an hour was overwhelming. But her testimony was that since she had been practicing praying as we were teaching that she had a hard time finishing her prayer in two hours.

There is an extreme blessing waiting for those who learn to tarry in the spirit of prayer for extended periods of time.

Prayer: Lord, I ask as your disciples asked, "Teach me to pray."

Message: Jesus was asking for more than a casual prayer. He indicates that he expected they would still be praying when he returned after being gone for an hour. There is an extreme blessing waiting for those who learn to tarry in the spirit of prayer for extended periods of time.

Affirmation: I have fellowship with God because I have learned to tarry in prayer until my own will and desires are submitted to his will and desires.

Reflection: How is your prayer life? If Jesus asked you, "Could you tarry with me for one hour?" would you be able to do that? Be intentional about prayer by setting aside extended periods of time to spend with the Lord.

My Thoughts:

Day Nineteen

Feed My Sheep

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” – John 21:15

The disciples were at a loss as to what they should do next. Jesus had been crucified. Yes, he had been raised from the dead, but the disciples seemed to be all alone. He had appeared to them on two occasions, but it was just for a little while and they didn't know what they were to do next so they went back to fishing.

Peter stood among the disciples and said something like, “Well guys, we don't really have any source of income just now so we had better do what we know to do so we can have food. I'm going fishing, who's going with me?” They all agreed so they went out to their boats and began to fish.

After fishing all night without catching any fish Jesus told them, “Throw your nets on the other side and you'll catch fish.” When they did that they caught so many fish they could barely bring them in.

When they realized it was Jesus who called out to them they hurriedly went to shore where he was ready to fix them breakfast. After they had eaten, Jesus looked at Peter and asked him if he loved Jesus more than the fish. Three times he asked him and three times Peter affirmed his love for the Lord.

Each time Peter responded Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” Jesus was affirming his love for Peter by letting him know that even though Peter had failed him he still considered Peter to be among the chosen ones.

Up until that time Peter was a bit anxious about how Jesus would respond when he saw him again. All doubt was removed when at the end of that conversation Jesus said, "Follow me."

Friend, when we have failed we often feel like Peter. We don't know how Jesus will respond. Sometimes our failure is so great we don't know whether he will still love us. Then he speaks and simply says, "Follow me."

Prayer: Lord, let me hear clearly your voice calling, "Follow me."

Message: When we have failed we often feel like Peter. We don't know how Jesus will respond. Sometimes our failure is so great we don't know whether he will still love us. Then he speaks and simply says, "Follow me."

Affirmation: Every time I fail then turn back to Jesus he lovingly calls me to back to him and simply says, "Follow me."

Reflection: Can we fail without being a failure? Three times Peter denied Christ and three times Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" There are two big questions which come out of this passage: 1) How do we feel when we have failed; 2) How does God feel when we have failed? Think about it.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty

Baptize My Disciples

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. – Matthew 28:18-20

Over the centuries there has been much discussion about baptism. There are those who believe that salvation is given at baptism and there are those who believe that baptism is spiritual and not a physical act at all, and all the rest of us fall somewhere in between those two.

The vast majority of evangelical Christians practice baptism for new believers as a public profession of faith in Jesus the Christ as our Lord and Savior. Baptism is that, and it is more.

Apostle Paul speaks of baptism as a symbol of being buried with Christ and when we come up out of the baptismal waters we are being raised to new life just as Christ was raised from the dead (Romans 6:3-5). In another place he likens baptism to circumcision, not of the flesh but of the heart (Colossians 2:9-12).

Baptism is more than just a physical act. Just as there is a miracle which takes place when a prayer of confession and repentance is made, so there is a spiritual work which takes place when people show their sincerity by taking on the name of the Lord in baptism.

In Matthew 28 Jesus links baptism and discipleship. It is almost as if a person is not complete as a disciple until he is baptized. On the day of Pentecost Peter was preaching to the Jews and when they asked what they

must do to remedy the wrong they had done he replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

We are called to go into the world, find converts, disciple them, and baptize them. It’s just that simple. Let’s go!

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a witness for you. Empower me with the Holy Spirit so that I may be effective in winning and discipling people. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: Peter told inquirers, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). We are called to go into the world, find converts, disciple them, and baptize them. It’s just that simple. Let’s go!

Affirmation: I have heard and received the message of Jesus Christ. Now I am committed to finding others who will hear and believe. I am committed to baptizing and making disciples of those who believe.

Reflection: Just a simple question; what are you doing to find converts, baptize them and make disciples of them?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty One

Receive God's Power

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. - Luke 24:49

Jesus left his disciples with a mandate which could not be carried out by man's ability alone. The gospel can certainly be preached in man's power, just as surely as the message of any other religion, but all man can do by his speaking and his intellect is reach the intellect of another man; Holy Spirit Power is needed to touch the spirit of man.

That is why believers have been promised Holy Spirit power. When Jesus gave the command to go to Jerusalem where they would be given this power he refers to John the Baptist saying, "John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5).

He gave them The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), then reiterated the promise of the Father (Luke 24), and finally told them that when the promised Holy Spirit came upon them they would receive power (Acts 1:8). That power was not for performing spectacular feats, but it was given so that signs and wonders would be performed as a witness that the gospel message they preached was indeed a message from God.

The concluding verse to the Gospel of Mark reads, "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." Jesus gave them a promise, told them to stay in Jerusalem until it came, then when it came they received great power.

I am afraid that many today sell the Holy Spirit short. It is common today to teach that we receive the Holy Spirit at conversion (and we do), but that is all there is to it. That is not what Jesus taught. In fact, it was converted believers who were sent to Jerusalem to seek God and stay there until the power came.

If we just receive the Holy Spirit by faith, and there is no evidence that he has come, how do we know when he has come? How did the disciples know when their time of waiting for the Holy Spirit was over? Holy Spirit infilling was accompanied by signs and wonders.

What signs and wonders have accompanied your claim of being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Lord, I need to be filled with Holy Spirit power; fill me. Amen.

Message: How did the disciples know when their time of waiting for the Holy Spirit was over? Holy Spirit infilling was accompanied by signs and wonders. What signs and wonders have accompanied your claim of being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Affirmation: God has affirmed my commitment to him by giving me the Holy Spirit which is the assurance and the sure sign of his indwelling.

Reflection: A really beautiful car without an engine will not take a person anywhere. Some people have a beautiful idea of what it is to have the Holy Spirit, but it appears they have no power (or engine) to propel them. How do we gain power in the Holy Spirit today?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Two

Wait for the Promise

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. - Acts 1:4-5

The art of waiting upon the Lord is being lost among many believers today. Our life is filled with much activity and far more to be accomplished than we will ever get done; the work is endless and there is little time to be used for prayer and waiting upon God, yet there is blessing for those who wait upon the Lord.

Jesus gave the command to those who would follow him, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised." This was not a casual request. It was his last request as he was about to ascend to heaven. We would do well today take the time to wait upon the promise of the Father.

I recognize that he was sending his disciples to Jerusalem with the anticipation that Holy Spirit would descend, they would be given great power and the church would be birthed. However, knowing that, we should be all the more impressed with the value of waiting for God to express his presence and his will.

I can look back to times when my life was most impacted by a touch from God and those times are marked by a time of consecration to prayer and spending much time before the Lord reading his word.

Jesus called his followers to forsake everything else and spend all the time necessary to connect with the promise of the Father. He is still calling for believers to separate themselves from the world and devote themselves to seeking the Father until He comes.

God is not just making a call to all believers - he is making an appeal to you. He is calling you to spend times of focused prayer, meditation and reading God's word as you seek his will for your place in the kingdom.

Jesus sent them to Jerusalem to receive the promise of the Father. Find your place to pray; seek him and he will come.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come as I seek the Father. Fill me now. Amen.

Message: God is still calling for believers to separate themselves from the world and devote themselves to seeking the Father until Holy Spirit comes with great power and revelation of the Father's will. The Lord is calling you to spend times of focused prayer, meditation and reading God's word as you seek his will for your place in the kingdom.

Affirmation: I have purposed to seek the Lord until I hear from heaven. I will continue in prayer until his will is revealed.

Reflection: Give some thought to the idea of being filled with Holy Spirit power. Is God calling you to spend time before him seeking him for Holy Spirit power to be manifest in your service to him?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Three

A Steadfast Faith

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

- Philippians 1:27

The world is changing so rapidly around us that it is difficult to keep pace. Freshmen in college are taught that by the time they graduate everything they have learned about technology will be obsolete.

When I was a child, statistics said that the average person would change jobs 5-8 times in his life. Now they say that people entering the job market today can expect to change jobs 20 times in their life.

We have become a world of sound-bites and 15 second TV advertising. We are being cultured to have a short attention span and be ready to make changes in lifestyle, relationships, families and beliefs.

In the middle of all this the Scripture calls us to “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.” I recently read some alarming news about the people of my generation. Statistics show that they are moving away from traditional Christianity by the multitudes and they are embracing other religions, or no religion at all.

There is a passage in Proverbs which reads, “Do not move ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers” (Proverbs 22:28). Very little is taught today about boundaries. I’m talking about social, moral and spiritual boundaries. We have been greatly

influenced by the modern culture which calls us to abandon convention and do whatever feels good.

The message of the Word of God is simply this; “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” We must be concerned about what God desires rather than what we desire.

Apostle Paul warns about being tossed back and forth by waves of worldly influence and blown about by changing winds of the doctrines. He warns that our enemy is scheming to deceive us and destroy our faith (Ephesians 4:14). The only protection we have against the deceitfulness of this age and our arch enemy, the devil, is to stand together, firm in the faith.

Prayer: Lord, grant me a steadfast heart to stand firm in the faith. Amen.

Message: The only protection we have against the deceitfulness of this age and our arch enemy, the devil, is to stand together, firm in the faith and present a united front against the assault of evil. Stand steadfast in faith.

Affirmation: I will guard my heart and mind so that I will remain steadfast for the faith of the gospel.

Reflection: Most things in our life are subject to change, but one thing that does not change is the hope presented in the unchanging gospel. How can we be protected against the spirit of this age which calls us to pluralism and compromise?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Four

How Can We Best Serve Him?

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

- Luke 10:38-42

Those of us who are achievers tend to be so driven by the task that we sometimes miss the better part. Such was the case with the two sisters, Mary and Martha. It was not a bad thing that Martha wanted everything to be just right for the dinner she was putting on in honor of Jesus, it just wasn't the best thing to be concerned about at the moment.

Mary, on the other hand, was focused on Jesus. His every word held her attention as he taught her the principles of the kingdom. Mary was not lazy neither was she neglecting her duty to help her sister, but she was doing the better thing for that moment.

A well known pastor made a confession. He tells how he was walking across the parking lot of the church one Sunday morning with one of his elders on his way to the service. His mind was on the service as he walked past a very concerned looking young man who approached him calling, "Hello pastor." This

pastor hardly noticed the young man way as he mumbled “Good morning.”

His elder told him, “You’ve done it again.” He asked, “What have I done?” “You walked right past that young man who was obviously troubled and you didn’t give him even a few seconds,” he was told. He realized that the urgency of the service had overrun his sensitivity to the necessities of this young man. There are times when we must choose the better over the urgent.

Prayer: Lord, help me so that I don’t get so busy doing your work that I fail to serve you and others properly. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message: We must learn to choose the best over the good. It was not a bad thing that Martha wanted everything to be just right for the dinner she was putting on in honor of Jesus, it just wasn’t the best thing to be concerned about at the moment.

Affirmation: I desire to be able to discern between the good and the best in my service to the Lord.

Reflection: This small incident in the life of Mary and Martha is given to help us understand that there are times when it is more important to sit at the feet of Jesus than it is to be busy doing good things.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Five

Enduring Weariness and Discouragement

He returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” - Matthew 26:41

The message here is not just prayer, although prayer is the primary point. The message extends to endurance. We have been reminded in many Scriptures that our walk of faith requires endurance and there is no other part of our faith walk which requires more tenacity than prayer.

I will confess that neglecting a consistent prayer time is the easiest habit for me to fall into. After all, I have so much to do; messages to write, people to visit, administrative details, etc., etc. God understands that with limited time it is very difficult to be consistent with a meaningful prayer life.

It is no doubt that the disciples were weary after a day of trying to keep up with Jesus as he ministered, then the lingering meal in which he revealed that one of them would betray him. Finally, there was the walk to the garden of Gethsemane where he left them to go pray. What was he to expect anyway, they were only human and they were tired.

What he expected was that they would endure just one hour of watching and praying. But what he got instead was a bunch of tired men who had not yet realized the value of demonstrating endurance in prayer.

I have a feeling that Jesus observes his modern followers with the same consternation. He sees our

daily routine. He knows are busyness. He can see how we wear ourselves out trying to do the work that can only be done through being enthused with Holy Spirit power and he cries out to us, “Can’t you just take the time to pray one hour? Are you so busy that you don’t have time to establish a prayer filled watch for your soul and for the work of the kingdom?”

We should be mindful of his concerned question, “Could you not keep watch with me one hour?”

Prayer: Lord, grant me repentance over my prayerlessness. Amen.

Message: God can see how we wear ourselves out trying to do the work that can only be done through being enthused with Holy Spirit power and he cries out to us, “Can’t you just take the time to pray one hour? Are you so busy that you don’t have time to establish a prayer filled watch for your soul and for the work of the kingdom?”

Affirmation: I am committed to ordering my life around my prayer time instead of working my prayer into my busy schedule.

Reflection: God knows how hard you work and he knows how praying effectively will help relieve your burden. If that is true then why do we not spend more quality time in prayer?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Six

Overflowing Thankfulness

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. - Colossians 2:6-7

I have a friend who is constantly talking about how much he loves the Lord. He tells how that he was a drug addict for 35 years and when he came to God it was because he was afraid of going to hell. Now he tells people that it began out of fear but now he serves Jesus out of Love.

Nearly every time I talk to him he tells me that he is so thankful that Jesus saved him and took away his addictions. That is thankfulness.

There is a tendency for most of us to begin taking our relationship with the Lord for granted. We just seem to slide into the routines of life without giving a lot of thought to where we would be without the hand of God on our lives.

I have noticed that believers who tend to lose their thankful attitude also begin to lose enthusiasm in their spiritual journey. In fact there seems to be a connection between a lack of being thankful, a coolness in our spiritual journey, and allowing the world system and way of doing things to creep into our lives.

Luke tells the story of ten lepers who were healed by Jesus. Of the ten, nine forgot to return to give thanks for what Jesus had done. The one who did return threw himself at Jesus feet and thanked him. Nine men received the gift of healing, but only one gave the gift of thankfulness (Luke 17).

One of the keys to unlocking the abundant life of joy and peace is thankfulness. Apostle Paul writes, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

As you are presenting your needs and requests before the Lord do not neglect showing him your thankfulness for what he has already done.

Prayer: God, grant me the grace of a thankful heart. Amen.

Message: Believers who tend to lose their thankful attitude also begin to lose enthusiasm in their spiritual journey. In fact, there seems to be a connection between a lack of being thankful, a coolness in our spiritual journey, and allowing the world system and way of doing things to creep into our lives.

Affirmation: I have found that the key to unlocking the door to peace and joy is thankfulness. Therefore, I choose to be thankful, even in my prayers of petition I am thankful.

Reflection: Have you noticed that the most unhappy people you know are also the most unthankful? And, have you noticed how those most thankful tend to be more optimistic and enthusiastic?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Seven

Hospitality is an Eternal Investment

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. - Luke 14:12-14

Jesus had been invited to dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee. He observed how the guests were maneuvering to get the best seats. Those present at the dinner were in the “who’s who” of the city. It is on this occasion that Jesus gives instructions concerning seating at a banquet.

He told them that they should look for the less prominent seats, then if the host feels they should be put in a more prominent place he will invite them to the better seat. Jesus also points out that if they have taken the seat of a more prominent person they will be embarrassed when asked to move to a less prominent seat (Luke 14:7-11).

Then he gives the instruction which is our text for today. The message seems very clear. When you do acts of kindness do not expect those you have blessed by the kindness to be in your debt. We should do kind deeds just because it is right to do so, and not so we can get something in return.

I remember a time when my wife and I invited a couple to live with us for a period because they were being evicted. We could have referred them to a homeless shelter, or we could have just blessed them and told them we would be praying for them, but we didn’t. We invited them to come live with us. These

folks were of a different ethnic group than my wife and I, but that didn't matter. They just needed a place to stay for a while.

Today they are among our closest friends. And as a result of the kindness we extended to them they rededicated their lives to Christ and are faithful workers in the church.

Practice doing a random act of kindness every day. You can cure depression by finding someone with greater needs than yourself and blessing them. Are you discouraged about your position in life? Find a homeless person and take them to lunch. You'll be surprised at how that will lift your spirits.

Prayer: Lord, help me give out of a pure heart not expecting a return.

Message: You can cure depression by finding someone with greater needs than yourself and blessing them. Are you discouraged about your position in life? Find a homeless person and take them to lunch.

Affirmation: Helping others lifts my own spirit and makes me feel good - that is why I help others at every opportunity.

Reflection: Investing in others has become an integral part of my life and that isn't necessarily an altruistic act. One of my motivators is the satisfaction I get from helping others. I may be addicted to the peace and joy I get when I help others. Try it and you too may become addicted.

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Eight

The Diligent Reap the Reward

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. - Hebrews 6:11-12

Hebrews 6 begins with an admonition to move beyond the most elementary teachings about Christ and move toward maturity. As we mature we should be able to build our lives on the foundation of repentance, faith, baptism, and concern for the judgment. The writer is not saying that we should now ignore these issues, but that once we have reached maturity we do not need to continue going back to address them.

What does that mean to us in a practical sense? It means that when we are growing in maturity we have already established a lifestyle of repentance. We are continually turning away from our flesh born desires and we are turning toward Christ.

It also means that when we have grown in our faith we should have a sense of security in our relationship with the Lord and we should no longer be concerned about judgment. We are not concerned with judgment because our life has been made holy by faith in Christ and it is he who lives through us now.

As the writer is encouraging others in faith he warns that land which does not bare good produce is in danger of being cursed (just as Jesus cursed the fig tree and it withered).

Finally he says, "Even though we speak this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case

- things that accompany salvation” (v9). He warns them then speaks encouragement to them. Then he addresses the subject of diligence.

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end.”He speaks of those “who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” Diligence, faith and patience are the marks of faithful saints.

In another place Apostle Paul tells us the race doesn’t go to the one runs the fastest but it goes to the one who endures to the end. God has promised the diligent a great eternal inheritance.

Prayer: Lord, I need a spirit of diligence to achieve your purposes.

Message: “We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end.”He speaks of those “who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” Diligence, faith and patience are the marks of faithful saints.

Affirmation: My goal is diligence in service and faith along with patience and persistence to go the distance.

Reflection: It would be good to read the first verses of Hebrews six and understand the elementary teachings about Christ. What are those "elementary teachings?" How have you demonstrated diligence, faith and patience in your journey?

My Thoughts:

Day Twenty Nine

Be Content With What God Gives You

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

- Hebrews 13-5

We live in an age of discontent. People are not satisfied with the government. The economy is in the tank. Relationships are breaking down and families are being scattered.

Charles Dickens captured the moment when he wrote the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Doesn't that sound like the way it is today? There is so much frustration that some are predicting some kind of revolution. Yet, in the middle of all this the flowers bloom, the geese fly south in the fall, and north in the spring. The Sun rises and sets every day. And the Lord has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

By all reports we are facing hard economic times, not only in our nation but around the world. And in that context the author of Proverbs writes, “Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil.”

The Apostle Paul speaks of the trials and troubles he faced in several of his writings. In Philippians he

was writing about being content in whatever state a person finds himself. He speaks of being in want, and having plenty. Then he says, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." And to show his faith he says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

A greater part of faith is learning to have godly contentment.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be content with what you provide. Amen.

Message: The Sun rises and sets every day. And the Lord has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." The Apostle Paul writes, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." And to show his faith he says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." A greater part of faith is learning to have godly contentment.

Affirmation: I have learned that as long as I am committed to following the Lord I am content with what he gives me.

Reflection: Can you see a parallel with today and the times Dickens describes in *A Tale of Two Cities*? What do you think is the source of all the malcontent in the world today? How can we who are followers of Christ be content?

My Thoughts:

Day Thirty

Our Greatest Ability is Availability

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” - Matthew 16:24

Far too often today we hear a message taught that if we just come to Jesus he will give us everything we need without teaching the corresponding call to responsible discipleship. We are promised that God will supply all of our needs according to his riches (Philippians 4:19), but that is only half the story.

When Jesus called people to follow him he wasn't inviting them to a Sunday afternoon picnic. He was asking them to make a radical change in the focus of their lives. The Greek word here translated “deny” is *aparneomai* and means to disown. Thayer's Greek English Lexicon says, “to forget one's self, lose sight of one's self and one's own interests.”

William Borden got the message of self denial as a teenager. Born into a wealthy family he was sent on a journey to see the world after his high school graduation. He was so moved by the poverty and wretchedness he saw around the world that he gave himself fully to God and committed to be a missionary. Upon making that commitment he wrote two words in the back of his Bible, “No Reserve.”

Through college at Yale he stirred his classmate so deeply that by the time he graduated there were over 1000 students meeting for weekly prayer. After graduation he was offered many high paying positions, but turned them down so that he could pursue being a missionary. He wrote two more words in his Bible: “No Retreat.”

On his way to China as a missionary he contracted spinal meningitis and was dead within a month. Before he died he wrote two more words in his Bible: “No regrets.”

William Borden’s life, short as it was has had an eternal impact. Jesus is calling you and I to make such a commitment. Does your life reflect no reserve, no retreat and no regrets?

Prayer: Lord, grant me the grace to live for you and at the end of my life to say no reserve, no retreat, and no regrets. Amen.

Message: William Borden’s life, short as it was has had an eternal impact. Jesus is calling you and I to make such a commitment. Does your life reflect no reserve, no retreat and no regrets?

Affirmation: My daily prayer is that my life will reflect that I have held nothing in reserve and set upon a course from which there is no retreat and though the world may see me as successful I have no regrets.

Reflection: God has promised to supply all of our needs and all he asks is that we trust him to do that. How are you doing with your trust of God?

My Thoughts:
