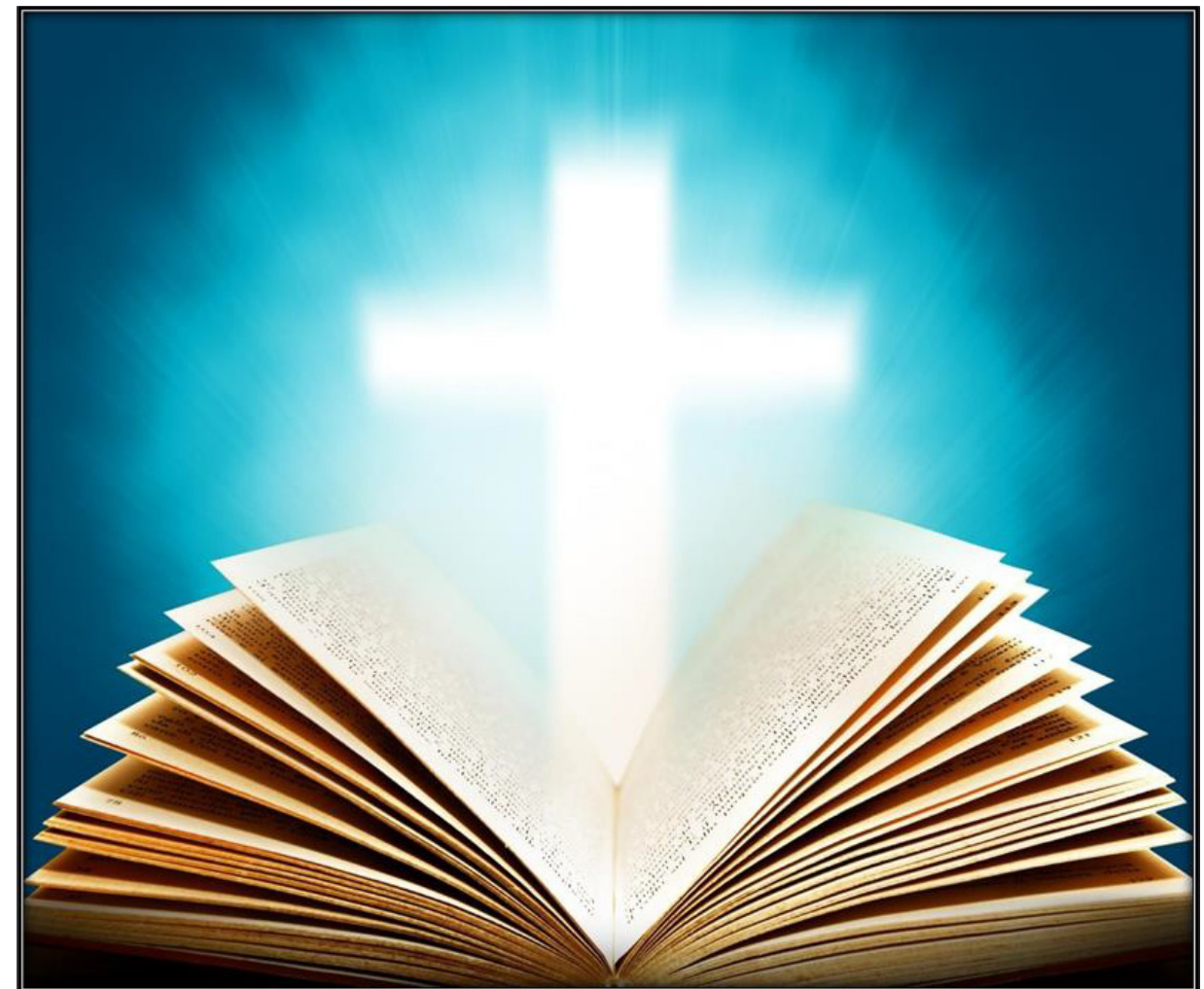


**E**VANGELISM AND **C**HURCH  
**P**LANTING **M**OVEMENTS



School of Global Missions

# EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS

## KINGDOM DISCIPLESHIP

### DISCIPLESHIP 102

#### Biblical Discipleship

School of Global Missions  
Dr. Frederick Osborn, M.Div., D.Min.

The School of Global Mission course curriculum for EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING is divided into six parts. Classes will meet one evening each week for one hour. Each part will be 12 lessons. It will take two years to complete all six parts.

Students will be required to take home extra materials and class handouts to read and study on their own.

At the end of each year (36 Lessons) each student will be required to submit a written summary of what they have learned (submission must be no less than three typed pages, single space, Times New Roman 12 pt. font). However, if the student has no access to a computer, special arrangements can be made for a handwritten paper to be submitted.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Frederick Osborn* traveled the world teaching and preaching the Word of God from 2005 - 2017. His first trip to South Asia was in 2001, and since 2005 he has been fully involved in ministry. His books and study guides have been used in classrooms by hundreds of students around the world.

In 2013 he earned his M.Div. from Andhra Christian Theological College in Hyderabad, India and in that same year was officially ordained into the ministry in a holy convocation administered by Indian pastors representing AG, CSA, and other independent ministries. In 2017 he completed his D.Min. from Covenant Bible College & Seminary, Florida, USA.

He and his wife, Deena now live near Atlanta, GA where he continues to write, teach, and publish his books and study guides.

## Evangelism and Church Planting Movements

Discipleship 102  
Biblical Discipleship

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Parts of the teaching materials of Discipleship 102 were previously published under the title, “Kingdom Discipleship” but they have been edited and reformatted by the author for the SGM course in Evangelism and Church Planting Movements.

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## Course Materials for EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS

*Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*, Second Edition, A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, © 2004, 2015, Pub. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI

*Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, with Timothy C. Tennent, © 2010, Pub. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI

*Developing A Strategy For Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Introduction*, John Mark Terry, J. D. Payne, © 2013, Pub. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI

*Encountering Missionary Life and Work: Preparing for intercultural Ministry*, Tom Steffen, Lois McKinney Douglas, © 2008, Pub. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI

### Published by Dr. Frederick Osborn:

*Church Planting Movements: India*

*Exploring the New Testament*

*Kingdom Discipleship: Becoming Like Jesus*

*Messiah: The Mission of Jesus of Nazareth*

*Reviving A Nation*

*The Apocalyptic Vision: Understanding the Apocalyptic Writings of the Bible*

*The Book of Acts: The Holy Spirit's Handbook for Church Planting Movements*

*The Holy Spirit in You: Nourishing the Life of Holiness and power in You*

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ: John the Apostle's Heavenly Vision of Christ the King*

*The Way, the Truth, and the Life: the Teachings and Ministry of Jesus the Messiah*

*This Gospel of the Kingdom*

## *School of Global Missions*

### SGM BIBLICAL STUDIES: DISCIPLESHIP 101-103

#### COURSE SYLLABUS - PROFESSOR

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#### COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course in EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS is designed to teach and train three groups: (1) those who are preparing to go to unreached people groups in foreign mission fields (2) those indigenous workers who need more teaching and training for the work they are doing, and (3) to provide materials for indigenous church planters to teach and train others for evangelism and church planting.

#### CREDIT VALUE:

SGM uses what is known as a *Trimester Calendar* for holding classes. In a trimester system, students have three terms of 12 weeks in each school year. The students will cover a full year's worth of teaching in a normal two-semester year. This course in EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS has a 30-credit hour value (Three Terms in Evangelism and Church Planting Movements Studies in the first year and Three Terms in Evangelism and Church Planting Studies in the second year).

#### COURSE TEXT:

The only required text for all School of Global Mission courses is THE HOLY BIBLE. We recommend that each student has a good Study Bible, if possible.

**NOTE TO STUDENTS:** SGM recommends the website, [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) for Bible translations and reference materials for Bible study. The site is also available on Mobile apps for your phone or tablet.

**NOTE TO PROFESSORS:** Additional materials are included in the teaching materials that you may or may not wish to take advantage of. Anything that is identified as HANDOUT material is NOT seen by the students unless you copy and give it to them as supplemental material. It will be up to the individual teacher to review the teaching materials and decide what to emphasize in their class time. Whatever is not covered in the class, the students will be able read and study as homework assignments.

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE STUDENTS:

1. Read the required texts.

**NOTE TO PROFESSORS:** Because the Bible is the only required text for all BIBLICAL STUDIES classes, the students should read the relevant chapters from the Scriptures. The chapters and verses covered in each class should be given at the beginning of each lesson.

2. Attend all classes in person or online, or review recording of an excused class (maximum two per term).

3. At the end of each term (12 weeks) write a term paper of at least three typewritten pages (12 point, Times New Roman font, single space.)

## EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS (FIRST YEAR LESSONS)

### EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS: DISCIPLESHIP 101 LESSONS

(LESSONS 1 – 12 *The Book of Acts: The Holy Spirit's Guide for Church Planting Movements*)

1. Introduction: From Jerusalem to the World, “Christ is Lord”
2. Jerusalem: A Move of the Holy Spirit
3. The Message: Kerygma & Personal Testimony
4. Paul’s First Missionary Journey: The Holy Spirit Prepares the Way
5. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey: A Church Planting Movement Takes Shape
6. Paul’s Third Missionary Journey: A Church Planting Movement is Established
7. Learning Points for Modern CPMs From Paul’s Missionary Journeys
8. Disciples Making Disciples:  
A Church Planting Movement is Extended (Part One)
9. Disciples Making Disciples:  
A Church Planting Movement is Extended (Part Two)
10. Developing A Strategy for Church Planting Movements:  
The Apostle Paul’s Missionary Strategy (Part One)
11. Developing A Strategy for Church Planting Movements:  
The Apostle Paul’s Missionary Strategy” (Part Two)
12. Obstacles to A Church Planting Movement

### EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS: DISCIPLESHIP 102 LESSONS

#### Kingdom Discipleship

1. Introduction to Biblical Discipleship
2. The Key Parable of “The Sower and the Soils” pt. one “Not for Everyone”
3. The Key Parable of “The Sower and The Soils” pt. two: “The Strongholds”
4. The Key Parable of “The Sower and The Soils” pt. three “The Thorns of Money, Sex, and Power”
5. The Key Parable of “The Sower and The Soils” pt. four “The Good Soil – A Heart Prepared to Receive”
6. The Terms of Discipleship “Counting the Cost”
7. The Terms of Discipleship “A Supreme Love for Christ and A Fervent Love for All Who Belong to Christ”
8. The Terms of Discipleship “A Deliberate Choosing of the Cross”
9. The Terms of Discipleship “Confronting the Giants of Self”
10. The Terms of Discipleship “A Life Spent Following Christ”
11. The Terms of Discipleship “An Unswerving Continuance in His Word”
12. The Terms of Discipleship “Abiding in Christ”

## EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS: DISCIPLESHIP 103 LESSONS

### Encountering Missionary Life and Work:

1. “Decision-making and the Will of God”
2. “Missions & Spiritual Formation”
3. “The Indigenous Mission Strategy”

### Theology of Mission

4. “God and the Nations in the Old Testament”
5. “God and the Nations in the New Testament”
6. “The Purpose and Nature of Mission”
7. “The Justification of Mission: *Missio Dei*”

### The Holy Spirit in Ministry Life and Work

8. “The Fruit-bearing Life”
9. “The Fruit of the Spirit”
10. “The Gifts of the Holy Spirit”
11. “The Ministry Gifts of the Spirit”
12. “The Kingdom of God and Missions”

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102 – BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

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NOTE: ALL HANDOUTS FOR THIS COURSE ARE IN A SEPARATE FILE. HANDOUTS ARE NOT INCLUDED WITH THE STUDENT NOTES. THE HANDOUTS MAY BE COPIED FOR THE STUDENTS AT THE TEACHER’S DISCRETION.

### NOTE TO THE TEACHER

Some of the material for these lessons of the School of Global Mission’s DISCIPLESHIP 102 COURSE are taken from other materials written by Dr. Frederick Osborn. The source material has been edited and reformatted from the original to conform to the hour-long lessons. No part of these TEACHING NOTES may be copied and distributed to others without the written permission of the author or the School of Global Missions administration.

**These special *Teaching Notes* are intended for the teachers only;** they are in Times New Roman #14 for ease of reading while teaching. A separate set of notes for the students has been produced and are intended for the student to read and follow as you use the Teaching Notes.

Because this course uses the Inductive Method of Bible Study, you will notice a number of places where words, phrases, or sentences are in **bold print and underlined** these are intended for the students as fill-in-the-blank answers in their Student Notes as they follow your lesson.

**There are more notes in the teaching materials than can be taught in the one-hour class time.** So, it is best to review each lesson before you start teaching and refer to the student notes for reading and homework assignments. The additional materials in the *Teacher’s Notes* allow the teacher some flexibility in how they teach this course. The teacher may look through the HANDOUTS and select which of the additional materials they want to copy and distribute to their students.

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-1 INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

### The Enemy’s Three Great Deceptions

The way of biblical discipleship is not an easy way; in fact, it is a hard, narrow road and few will even want to diligently search for it, let alone walk it (Matthew 7:13-14). If the Laodicean church of Revelation 3:14-21 is the model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church, then most would rather remain in the comfortable, complacency that the enemy offers as a counterfeit substitute for the genuine, faith made of gold purified by fire. There are three great deceptions the enemy uses to keep Christians from reaching maturity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. **A way that is costless.** David Platt says it about as well as it can be stated: “The danger of spiritual deception is real. As a pastor, I shudder at the thought and lie awake at night when I consider the possibility that scores of people who sit before me on Sunday morning might think they are saved when they are not. Scores of people who have positioned their lives on a religious road that makes grandiose promises at minimal cost. We have been told all that is required is a one-time decision, maybe even mere intellectual assent to Jesus, but after that we need not worry about his commands, his standards, or his glory. We have a ticket to heaven, and we can live however we want on earth. Our sin will be tolerated along the way. Much of modern evangelism today is built on leading people down this road, and crowds flock to it, but in the end, it is a road built on sinking sand, and it risks disillusioning millions of souls.” David Platt, *Radical*, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO. © 2010, P.38
2. **A half-truth that has saves us “from” sin but has no power to save (sanctify) us “to” live a holy life (1 Peter 1:13-16).** 1 Corinthians 10:11-12 is a strong reminder to Christians that the experiences of Israel recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures are more than interesting history. The experiences of Israel – their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, receiving the law at Mount Sinai, all the miracles in the Wilderness, etc. – were given as examples for the church to warn us not to repeat the same mistakes as the children of Israel. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (v. 12).

The books of Moses overflow with great miracles and wondrous signs that the Lord performed on behalf of His people; they were given the great Ten Commandments, and the highest civil and religious laws to guide them. God provided manna for them every day, a pillar of cloud and fire to guide them day and night, and one of the greatest leaders in history to lead them. And yet, the Scriptures show that most did not please God and were laid low in the Wilderness, never to enter into God’s rest.

Israel was “Saved FROM” Egypt, baptized, and given the perfect moral law to guide them. But they fell short. Why? What happened to a generation that was given so much, but failed the test and could not enter into the Promised Land? The children of Israel believed in a salvation that was only meant to save them from their enemies and insulate them from the trials and tribulations of life. They failed because whenever trials or persecutions came against them, their commitment to God, His word, and their faith dried up and blew away. Time and time again they fell into sin and unbelief because they could only worship God from a distance and therefore never really knew the God who saved them (Exodus 20:18-20).

A Christianity that saves people as they are (justifies) but leaves them spiritually unchanged, will not save (sanctify) them (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). In the same way that God saved the children of Israel from Egypt for a purpose, Jesus Christ saves whoever believes in Him for a purpose; and that purpose will only be fulfilled when the person saved from a life of sin (justified), becomes a true disciple of Jesus and is daily pressing on, being sanctified *to* the Promised Life (glorification) that the Father offered from the very beginning. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 3:18).



Satan does not care how many half-hearted, uncommitted, converts fill the churches every week, but he shudders with fear whenever one of them picks up their cross and becomes a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ, walking in His

footsteps. “We realize that we are saved not just to be forgiven of our sins or to be assured of our eternity in heaven, but we are saved to know God. So, we yearn for him. We want him so much that we abandon everything else to experience him. This is the only proper response to the revelation of God in the gospel. This is why men and women around the world risk their lives to know more about him. This is why we must avoid cheap caricatures of Christianity that fail to exalt the revelation of God in his Word. This is why you and I cannot settle for anything less than a God-centered, Christ-exalting, self-denying gospel.” David Platt, *Radical*, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO., © 2010, p.39.

It is a travesty whenever a pastor stands before his congregation and tells them in essence that a life of justification by grace is enough, and that pressing on to sanctification by dying to the self-life is equal to religious legalism. Those members will die off in the Wilderness never experiencing the fullness of the life Jesus offers.

3. **A life that is an imitation life – has the appearance of life but there is nothing real.** A Christian who is “saved” from sin only, is a person who is willing to follow Jesus as their Savior but unwilling to follow him as their Lord. Those who will only follow Jesus as their Savior will perish in the Wilderness – on the wayside (Matthew 13:19); their faith will fail them when it becomes too costly. God wants to raise a generation of disciples who are “saved to” the genuine life in the Spirit. He died for us so that we can enter into His rest at the end of this life (Hebrews 4:1-3). Christians cannot make it as a disciple apart from abiding (living) in a life that is not their own (John 15:1-11); it is a life lived out of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-20).

A disciple is more than a person who believes what someone else told them about Jesus. A disciple is more than someone who tries to do or not do what Jesus would or would not do in any given situation. A true disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who lives in and by the power of the “living water” of Christ within (John 4:13).

Biblical discipleship is living every day *doing* what Jesus *is* doing in and through us by His indwelling Spirit. The former way of conversion without transformation, is based upon an ability to successfully imitate Jesus’ life: appearing “religious” on the outside (like Nicodemus), or by attempting to hide our sin and shame from everyone (like the Samaritan woman at the well). True discipleship depends upon the Life of “Christ in us” working and doing His perfect will of genuine transformation in us. If He is not *being and doing* His will in His disciple, it’s an imitation life – a counterfeit. “Jesus brought glory to his Father through self-giving love. Now we have the opportunity to continue

the glorifying of the Father through lives poured out for him and for those whom Jesus died for.” (Peter Maiden, *Discipleship*, Authentic Books, Secunderabad, India, © 2007, pp.47-48).

An imitation life will have only imitation fruit. Imitation fruit is unable to sustain and nourish the life of the body. Imitation fruit has no life in it and does not have the ability to reproduce itself. Imitation discipleship is inadequate to sustain and nourish the spirit. An imitation disciple does not have the life of the Holy Spirit, and therefore cannot reproduce (make other disciples). Imitation disciples will not take the narrow way that leads them all the way to God’s promised rest (glorification).

#### THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM IS THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION

“Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.’ **But they understood none of these things;** this saying was **hidden** from them, and they **did not know** the things which were spoken.” Luke 18:31-34 (NKJV)

When carefully compared with the standard evangelistic message of today, this is a startling passage of Scripture. The setting is on the road to Jerusalem. Jesus is about to make His final entry into that city before He will be arrested and crucified. His death, burial, and resurrection are only days away and He is preparing His disciples for what is about to happen. His disciples had heard Jesus preach the gospel for 3 ½ years. The very first words of Jesus that Mark records are “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*” (1:15). Luke makes it very clear that the disciples had been empowered and equipped to go out everywhere and preach the gospel (9:6). Time and time again Jesus had taught them the gospel, but now He is telling them He is about to be arrested, whipped, and beaten, mocked, spit upon and killed; and the disciples did not have a clue what in the world Jesus was talking about. They understood none of it; the truth was hidden from them; and they did not know anything Jesus was saying. The obvious question at this point in time is, “What was the gospel Jesus had been preaching for over three years and that His disciples were also preaching?”

The enemy robbed the Laodicean church of something. But it was not the three-day work of Christ: His death, burial, and resurrection. They have that

evidenced by the fact that they are numbered with the seven churches with the seven lampstands. But what they lost was the truth that there is a difference between the three-day work and the three-year work of Christ described in the rest of the Gospels. *The Laodiceans were deceived into thinking there is life in Christ apart from a willingness to surrender all to Jesus as Lord of their lives.* For them salvation was all about the reconciliation of the cross and that was everything they needed. Yes, the cross is of first importance because without **the Atonement**, there is no **reconciliation**. There is no access to this other life: the life of “Christ within, the hope and glory” which is the narrow way. Living as a disciple is intended to lead us to a life-long commitment to being **transformed** by the indwelling Spirit of God.

Jesus went about preaching and demonstrating the reality of a Gospel that most Christians living in Laodicea have no understanding of because all they know is an incomplete gospel that begins and ends with the death, burial, and resurrection. But that is an incomplete and inadequate Gospel. “...the cross was God’s work on His own behalf. Through the cross God accomplished what He needed to fulfill His own eternal purpose that all things might be summed up in Christ. ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ is primarily His glory. Christ lives in us to manifest His life through us. Christ in us accomplishes His own purposes. Part of His purpose is **intimacy with us**. But His plan encompasses more than that. He is working toward His own ends, and we are the vessels through which, He works. We are the **visible manifestation** of what God is doing, with Himself as the ultimate goal, ‘that God may be all in all’ (1 Corinthians 15:28).” Greg Smith, *The Rest of the Gospel*, One Press, Dallas, TX, © 2000, p.12

The Laodicean church robbed itself; it made itself wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked by their unwillingness to surrender all to Jesus. They may have been deceived, but their condition does not have to be a permanent one. Jesus says to the church of Laodicea:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:19-22

Those who do not have, nor want to receive a love for the truth will end up being deceived every time and will stop short of the promise. In the end they will worship “A God without wrath [that] brought men without sin into a Kingdom

without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.” – H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*. At every turn, Satan will attempt deceive the church regarding the way, the truth, and life Jesus came to give and will offer a counterfeit Christian life that falls short of entering into the promised life of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). The way of biblical discipleship is **not** the life of Christ within but is the way disciples prepare themselves to receive it.

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” 2 Timothy 3:1-5

We live in very perilous times. There is little argument from the world’s pundits against the idea that the world at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is on the brink of enormous economic, social, and spiritual upheavals. The economic, social, and spiritual fabrics of individual nations which are all tied together in a global economy are being stretched to the limit. Tremendous internal forces of class warfare, political turmoil, systemic corruption, overburdened infrastructures, globalization, and modernization may end up tearing some of these nations apart. More Christians than ever before believe we are in the beginning throes of the biblical Last Days.

At the same time, Christians in most of the world are experiencing unprecedented persecution and attacks. The newspapers and Internet are filled with stories of Christians being attacked and killed in many places around the world. Across central Africa, Christians are facing violence and brutality against them as extremists from North Africa and the Middle East seek by force to dominate the entire continent.

No one knows for sure how many thousands of Christians are being held in Chinese prisons while churches are being bulldozed and shuttered by the Communist regime that still holds absolute power over its people. All this is happening while in the West, Christianity is collapsing. Europe is being overrun by non-Christian refugees fleeing there by the millions and overwhelming Europe’s borders and cultures. In the meantime, Christians in the United States are increasingly surrendering to the rising tide of secular humanism, postmodern relativism, and nihilism while they struggle to hold on to a prosperity that they feel rapidly slipping through their fingers.

If indeed, the Laodicean church represents the church of the “last days” then much of its power is counterfeit. A counterfeit life is one that has only a form of godliness: a plant without fruit, or an artificial fruit without seed. Most Christians today live a life short of the promises of victory and spiritual abundance by overcoming fear, oppression, physical want... and most important of all, overcoming the deception of this age.

Today more than ever, Christians need to stop fooling themselves, see the collapsing world around them, and get serious about who in this world they are supposed to be. Pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, etc. can no longer afford to follow the Western model of a “Laodicean” church. Churches that exist to draw in, entertain, and amuse uncommitted converts in church buildings on Sunday mornings in order to wring out of them their tithes and offerings, just so the process can continue week after week without any purpose or direction for those who put their hope in Christ for salvation.

**The way out is the way is the way of a truly radical lifestyle of total commitment to Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord: Kingdom Discipleship.** The way of biblical discipleship is how the disciple radically alters everything about their lifestyle in order to prepare their heart to receive the *One* who is the way, truth, and life. Jesus says to the disciple, “follow Me” so that He might take His rightful place and reign in the heart of that disciple.

As Jesus said from the beginning, the way of kingdom discipleship is not for everybody. Most will remain on the wayside, or they will be unwilling to deal with the hard places that have to be surrendered to become a disciple who is truly rooted and grounded in Christ; still others will be so tangled in the daily struggles to pursue or maintain worldly pleasures that their growth will be stopped short of maturity and they will never produce the fruit of a life totally surrendered to Christ. But for those who persevere to the end, whose hearts long for the presence of the Holy Spirit within, He will lead us through the Wilderness of this world to where we can rest in Him.

#### E. STANLEY JONES & MAHATMA GANDHI

When the Christian missionary, E. Stanley Jones first encountered India’s great Hindu spiritual leader, Mahatma Gandhi, he asked him what could only be considered a very bold question: “How can we make Christianity naturalized in India, and not a foreign thing, identified with a foreign government and a foreign people, but a part of the national life of India and contributing its power to India’s uplift? What would you, as one of the Hindu leaders of India tell me, a Christian, to do in order to make this possible?”

Gandhi's response was as bold and direct as was Jones' question. He said, "First, I would suggest that all of you Christians, missionaries, and all, must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second, practice your religion without adulterating it or toning it down. Third, emphasize love and make it your working force, for love is central in Christianity. Fourth, study the non-Christian religions more sympathetically to find the good that is within them, in order to have a more sympathetic approach to the people."

There is no doubt that what Mahatma Gandhi did at that moment was put his finger on exactly why Christianity has not only failed to capture the hearts and minds of the majority of Indians, but also why it is collapsing in much of the West today. One does not need to look too deeply into what is taking place in the church in much of the West to know that something is terribly wrong. The church in most of Europe is a pale shadow of that bastion of Christian faith it once was. The fire of the Great Reformation that swept across Europe ignited a missionary zeal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and propelled the Gospel message around the world. But that fire has all but gone out in the West. In America, the passion of the 2nd Great Awakening subsided into a sleepy complacency as Christians turned inward and settled into selfish, self-centered and self-indulgent American Dream of the big house, fast car, and high-paying job. The materialism of the American church has now reached a point where there is little difference between the way Christians live and the way their unchurched neighbors live: both have the same dreams, goals, ambitions, and values. Young people in the US are leaving the church in droves; and if the truth be told, fewer than ever before even see the need to be brought into the church in the first place.

It may be very crazy to think that a devout Hindu from an Asian country where so few people are Christians might well have put his finger on the pulse of Christianity and correctly diagnosed the sickly condition of the church and offered to all Christians everywhere the remedy needed to put the church back on its feet and point it in the right direction. But that is precisely what Gandhi did. The Mahatma proposed a remedy that Jesus Christ Himself would have prescribed if He were asked the same question. Just before His departure at the end of His first Incarnation, Jesus gave His disciples (and by implication the entire church) specific instructions they were to follow. The book of Acts records how those instructions were carried out by the first generation of disciples, and the impact they made “turning the whole world upside down” in just a few short years.

If pastors, evangelists, and ministry leaders in the church today are honest and face the facts, they will have to admit that there is a huge gap between what is presented as “normal” Christianity and what Jesus clearly taught was supposed to be the “norm” for His followers. The very word “Christian” implies someone who is like Christ – someone who is more than a Christian in name only, but who is

proven to be a disciple of Jesus Christ by their lifestyle. “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:16-20). Jesus made it clear that His disciples were more than followers of:

- A religion
- A set of teachings
- A particular denomination, church, group, or ministry

A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ – not only a follower, but a pupil. A “disciple” is an adherent – one who binds himself to observe and obey the teachings of their master. A disciple is one who imitates their master to the point where they no longer imitate, but actually become like their master in every way. By definition then a “Christian” is more than someone who knows about Jesus or who knows what the teachings of the church are. A true Christian is someone who not only knows about and believes in Jesus but is someone who intimately knows Jesus and follows Him as their Master (Lord). A follower of Jesus is a disciple; and a disciple is one who is bound to their Master – bound to observe (obey) or live out the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ in their day-to-day existence. Jesus was very clear about that; He said, “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). Therefore, a person is not truly a Christian unless they are truly a disciple. And a person is not truly a disciple unless they are like their teacher in every way:

*“A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”* Luke 6:40 (NIV)

*“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master...”* Matthew 10:24-25a (NIV)

Discipleship, which means **becoming like Christ in word and deed**, is the very heart of Christianity; it is the reason why Jesus came to this earth. Yes, Jesus came to save sinners – of that there is no doubt – but that is not the end of the story. Salvation is the crossing over from death to life, but that is only the beginning for the Christian. It is far from being all of it. In His humanity, Jesus became like us in every way; He did that in order for us to be able to become like Him in every way. The Incarnation was not an end in itself; neither was the cross.

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If all Jesus came to do was die upon the cross for the sins of the world, then that would have been the end of the story, but it was not. The end of the story is found in the resurrection and what lies beyond – the life beyond the cross. And it is for this life that Jesus saved whosoever would believe in Him: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” Romans 8:29.” (See HANDOUT “What was Jesus like?”)

“The Lord Jesus made stringent demands on those who would be His disciples – demands that are all but overlooked in this day of luxury-living. Too often we look upon Christianity as an escape from hell and a guarantee of heaven. Beyond that, we feel that we have every right to enjoy the best that this life has to offer. We know that there are those strong verses on discipleship in the Bible, but we have difficulty reconciling them with our ideas of what Christianity should be.”  
William MacDonald, From “True Discipleship”

When faced with truly following Jesus in word and deed, many Christians today might say, “That’s all well and good, but does Jesus really expect me to live that way? Isn’t the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ the ideal – just the target to shoot for – but certainly not what God expects me to model?” This attitude explains why there is such a huge disconnect between what Jesus taught His disciples and how the average Christian of today conducts their daily life. Leaders have the responsibility to close the gap between what Jesus taught and how Christians live. That means pastors, deacons, elders, etc. have the first responsibility to model Christ in their behavior. People will follow as they are led; and if they do not see Christlikeness in their leaders, how can those leaders expect those under their ministry to become Christlike? And if this gulf widens between what Jesus taught and how Christians actually live, then Christians around the world will lose their saltiness and the light of their lamps will grow dim even as the twilight of this age approaches quickly.

Being a true disciple of Jesus Christ means to become like Jesus Christ. It is not possible to become like Christ unless a Christian practices his or her religion without adulterating or toning down what Jesus taught about the cost and the necessity of being a disciple. Jesus lived out of pure agape, and to follow Jesus means to **walk in love**, to **emphasize love**, and to make **Christlike love** the disciple’s working force. Gandhi was right in saying, “love is central in Christianity” for God is love:

“No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us His Spirit. And

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we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” 1 John 4:12-16

Gandhi was right about another point: it is important for Christians to study and compare their faith with the faiths of others. Christians must indeed find points of commonality and mutual respect for followers of other religions. **However, in the process of understanding other faiths, we must never end up devaluing our own faith and eroding confidence in the absoluteness of the truth we profess in Jesus' name.**

Christian leaders – because they are leaders – have the eyes of the world upon them, and often others are looking just to see if they will fall. And when they do fall and behave in an un-Christlike manner, their nakedness and shame is always exposed for the world to see. If Christian leaders and laypersons alike do not find a way to repent and follow Jesus as true disciples, Christianity in the West will continue to fall apart, and will never be more than a small minority in India and other countries where the Gospel has never been generally accepted. The challenge for the leaders of the church in India is to not pattern themselves after those leaders in the West who have abandoned their mandate to participate in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 and are not making disciples. If unreached nations are going to become majority Christian nations, then the church leaders in those nations must end their love affair with Western style, materialistic, Christianity, and become disciples who seek the Lord Jesus Christ with their whole hearts, mind, soul, and strength. True disciples of Jesus Christ will stop fighting, gossiping, and end their petty jealousies and power struggles. True disciples will overcome their differences and forgive one another so that they can draw together and unite in the love of Christ that all disciples share. Disciples will truly obey Christ's command to love, support, and encourage one another.

If the billions of lost people around the world are ever going to have a chance to hear the powerful message of salvation in Christ, then Christians must take Gandhi's advice and start living what they say they believe for all to see. That is what discipleship in the kingdom of God is all about, and that is what all Christians should be doing: living as true disciples. From beginning, new believers should be taught the Lord's terms for being His disciple; and they should be encouraged to teach others how to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Biblical discipleship is the normal Christian life.

## QUESTIONS FOR LESSON ONE

1. Review the enemy's Three Great Deceptions discussed in this lesson. How do these deceptions affect the way Christians live their lives?
2. Compare the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached with the gospel being presented to unreached people today. Would you agree or disagree that the gospel presented in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John has been watered down or altered to make it more attractive?
3. Truly, love is central in Christianity. How can we express love to the non-Christian world without sacrificing the truth of God's Word?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-2 THE KEY PARABLE OF “THE SOWER AND THE SOILS”

### Not For Everyone

“Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?’” Mark 4:13.

**READ MATTHEW 13:1-23. Jesus Used the Parable of “The Sower & Soils” to Illustrate Who Truly Is a Disciple of His.**

Matthew sets the scene. As is so often the case, Jesus is with His disciples when “great multitudes” gathered around. On this occasion they pressed in so close to them that that Jesus got into a boat and began teaching them as the crowds stood on the shore and listened. A casual study of this passage might miss some very important elements of this key parable.

First, after teaching this parable, the disciples ask Jesus a question that indicates **a change in His teaching ministry**: “Why do You speak to them in parables?” (V 10) In chapters 5-7, Matthew records the longest sermon of Jesus in any of the Gospels. Up until this point (Matthew 13), Jesus has been teaching openly and plainly the Gospel of the Kingdom, but now His teaching ministry shifts and many of His public sermons are now in parables. So the natural reaction of His disciples is to ask, “Why parables now?”

Matthew 13:11-17 records Jesus’ answer to His disciples. Jesus told His disciples that the mysteries of the kingdom that He was teaching in parables were not for the multitudes but were for His disciples only. (See HANDOUT “The Parables of Jesus”).

If we examine Matthew 13 in the broader context of what is taking place in Jesus’ ministry at that time, then it becomes clear that although many were coming to Him for the “loaves and fishes” and for the healing miracles, most of those in the crowds following Him had no intention of submitting to Him as their Lord. John 6:24-27 (NKJV) adds further insight:

“...when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, ‘Rabbi, when did You come here?’ Jesus answered them

and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.’”

**The Gospels reveal that the nation of Israel as a whole was not willing to submit to Jesus as their King. They had seen His miracles and had listened to His sermons, but still they would not believe.**

Those who saw Jesus’ miracles but would not commit themselves to Him, were joined by the scribes, Pharisees and teachers of the law who were the religious authorities over the Jews. Often in the crowds surrounding Jesus were the priests, the keepers of the Temple in Jerusalem who controlled all that took place there. The Pharisees, scribes, and priests acted together as religious overseers who made sure every Jew knew their obligation to keep the Law of Moses. All but a handful of these religious leaders openly resisted Jesus’ influence over the multitudes that came and listened to His sermons. Jesus’ confrontations with these religious leaders over their distorted interpretations of the Law and Sabbath regulations became increasingly open and hostile. Although the Jews saw His many miracles and knew the Scriptures concerning the coming of the Messiah, they still demanded of Jesus more signs to prove Himself (Matthew 12:38; John 2:18; 6:30). **It was in this context that Jesus began to teach in parables.**

So, from this point forward, Jesus began to narrow His message so that only those disciples who were willing to listen and obey His teachings would understand them. Jesus knew that in the end, all but a few of His disciples would abandon Him and that the multitudes who praised Him for His many signs and wonders would quickly desert Him when they did not receive what they wanted from Him: “... many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:23b – 25).

“Surprisingly enough, when Jesus begins to unfold this inescapable truth to his disciples, he once more sets them free to choose or reject him. ‘If any man would come after me,’ he says. For it is not a matter of course, not even among the disciples. Nobody can be forced; nobody can even be expected to come.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A time would come after His resurrection when Jesus would command His disciples to go out to the entire world and preach the Good News of salvation, but the mysteries of the kingdom are always reserved only for those who have committed themselves fully to the King of kings.

In this key parable of the sower, Jesus reveals to His disciples and to all spiritual “sowers” who would come after them (the teachers, preachers, missionaries, and evangelists) why not everyone who hears the gospel of the kingdom will respond to it. Note the following:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD.” Jeremiah 31:27-28

“Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!’” Hosea 2:23

“I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; They shall live, together with their children, And they shall return.” Zechariah 10:9

“He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.” Matthew 13:37

These Scriptures speak directly of the Father and the Son as kingdom sowers, and indirectly of the Holy Spirit as the sower. The Holy Spirit is the “Divine Wind” that lifts and scatters the sons of the kingdom throughout the world, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). As the “Spirit of truth,” the Holy Spirit sows the seed of the word into the hearts of men. “He will take of what is Mine,” Jesus said, “and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

“We receive the Lord Jesus Christ into our lives, his Spirit takes residence within us and our bodies become the temple in which he lives. This must lead to whole life transformation and whole life discipleship, as we submit to his rule and authority.” Peter Maiden

**Every disciple should be a sower.** It is not just the clergy, who are ministers of the Word, but every believer is called by the Spirit to be a **disciple**; and that in turn qualifies them by the grace of God to **disciple other believers**. The Holy Spirit endows every disciple with spiritual gifts and talents that enable them to fulfill their solemn responsibility to make disciples. As sowers of the kingdom, parents, Sunday school teachers, lay preachers, elders, or deacons share the same responsibility for the Great Commission of making disciples as do the Apostles, prophets, priests and seminary college graduates. All the sower has to do is sow; it is beyond his power to make the seed grow. A discipler is only responsible to present the truth to the disciple; it is beyond his or her power to make the disciple grow. Spiritual growth is between the disciple and the Lord.

Sowers of the kingdom participate in the Great Commission’s mandate when they go and make disciples (not converts), teaching them to obey everything the Lord commanded.

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because ‘All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.” 1 Peter 1:22-25

“Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.” 2 Corinthians 9:10-11

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth...” Colossians 1:3-6

Disciples will shamelessly and liberally sow into the hearts of men the imperishable Word of the gospel of the kingdom Jesus preached. Knowing that this good seed may not penetrate the hearts of everyone, the sower presses on notwithstanding the disappointments, because he or she understands that once “the word of truth of the gospel” is received into the ready heart, it will bring forth out of the fields of this world a rich harvest of righteousness for the kingdom of heaven.

“Four fishermen stood by a sea in the first century when Jesus approached them. ‘Follow me,’ he said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ With that, Jesus beckoned these men to leave behind their professions, possessions, dreams, ambitions, family, friends, safety, and security. He bid them to abandon everything. ‘If anyone is going to follow me, he must deny himself.’ Jesus would say repeatedly.”  
David Platt

### THE SOILS

When we read Matthew 13:3-9 the four soils mentioned in this parable are described as:

1. The path or wayside soil
2. The rocky soil
3. The thorny soil
4. The good soil

Matthew 13:18-23 gives us Jesus’ explanations of the soils. His explanation of the parable tells us that not everyone is willing or able to receive **the seed of the kingdom** when it is sown into their heart. The different soils represent the different **heart conditions** of those who hear the word of the kingdom. Their responses are determined by what kind of “soil” or heart the seed is being sown into. As we carefully examine each of the four soils in this parable, we will see how the different characteristics of each heart affect the ability of the hearer to **receive the seed sown into them.**

Review the sermons of Jesus in the Gospels. Is there ever a time when at the end of a sermon Jesus concluded by asking, “With every eye closed and every head bowed... All you need to do now is pray these words after me and now you are saved”? **Think about the modern methods of presenting the Gospel in evangelistic meetings today.** All too often the evangelistic messages of today lead up to that time of decision to follow Jesus with promises that Jesus will unconditionally,

- heal all of their ailments

- meet all of their needs
- solve all of their problems
- and give them a life of unending peace and prosperity

All of the above are promised to be waiting for them; and all they need to do is ask Jesus to forgive their sins, which He is ready and waiting to do without any further commitment or cost to them. The Gospel is presented as unconditional, unending blessings pouring down from heaven free of cost for the faithful because Jesus paid it all for them. There is little if any talk of the cost of becoming a Christian and what it means to follow Him.

“The vast majority of believers only know one half of the gospel. The first twelve years that I pastored, I only knew one half of the gospel. I preached a steady diet of ‘Christ died for the forgiveness of your sins.’ Week after week I gave the same basic message. The problem was that my audience had already been saved; their sins had already been forgiven.” Dan Stone

For many who live in particular areas of the world where human rights are not guaranteed or who come from non-Christian religious backgrounds there certainly is **risk** involved for openly professing their faith in Jesus Christ. In most Western countries the worst thing that might happen to someone who becomes a Christian is that they might face the ridicule of their non-believing friends, or they might be accused of becoming some kind of religious fanatic. But in many other parts of the world there is great risk involved in becoming a Christian. In most Muslim and Hindu countries, a person will, at the very least, face expulsion from their family. In some places a person will be put in prison or killed for becoming a Christian. But no matter who you are or where you are from, there is a high, high cost to be paid if you are going to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ; and that cost is nothing less than to **deny and die to yourself** by picking up your cross daily and following Jesus as your Savior AND Lord (Luke 9:23).

“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: when anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.” Matthew 13:18-19

When we compare verses like Matthew 8:18-22; 13:2; 19:21-25; Luke 14:25-33; and John 6:25-27; 6:60-66 with Matthew 13:19 they can tell us a lot about what Jesus meant by “Wayside” believers in His Parable of the “Sower and

the Soils.” In Matthew 8:18-22 Jesus responds to a scribe who wanted to follow Him by saying, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head.” And when another of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” It is easy to follow Jesus when you are promised houses, cars, and money in the bank, but not so easy when these things become part of the cost of following Him.

It is the same with family relations; when we start to look at the terms of discipleship, we will see how essential it is for us to make our relationship with Jesus Christ supreme – above every other human relationship. Most of those who come to Jesus are willing to sit and listen to a good sermon, or they may come for the healings, signs, and wonders, but like the multitude gathered to listen to Jesus, most will only stand on the shore and listen, but few are truly willing or able to let go of everything that might come between them and Jesus and truly launch out into the deep waters of following Him – no matter the cost. **Biblical discipleship requires nothing less than our all; it means following Jesus for eternal blessings and not for whatever earthly benefits we might get from His hand.** This kind of radical disciple follows Jesus as Lord of their life not for the signs or miracles, but simply because He Is Lord, and therefore requires nothing less than our all to follow Him.

The deeper our spiritual walk is with Jesus, the more certain it will be that we will encounter a **“hard saying” of Jesus** that is difficult for the natural mind to comprehend. “It is the Spirit who gives life” Jesus said, “...the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” And the deeper our spiritual walk becomes, the **more radical is the faith** it requires of us. If we are going to see the Son of Man high and lifted up, we must follow Him unconditionally. When that kind of faith is required, many of His disciples will turn back and walk and with Him no more if they are not told from the beginning that there is a cost for being a disciple.

“Our Lord... promised eternal life to his followers; the disciples fastened on that plain saying, and resolved to cleave to him, when others fastened on hard sayings, and forsook him. Christ's doctrine is the word of eternal life; therefore we must live and die by it. If we forsake Christ, we forsake our own mercies.” Matthew Henry

In order to fully understand this parable of the Sower and the Soils, it is important to understand the context in which Jesus taught it. Matthew described the multitudes that were following Jesus everywhere and pressing in on Him seeking signs and wonders; they came for the “loaves and fishes”; many came as

curious onlookers wanting to see the “show.” The religious leaders were following Him everywhere, judging His every word and deed and hoping to catch Him committing a grave offense against their religion so they would have an excuse to eliminate Him. Some, like Nicodemus (John 3) would follow Him from a distance, not quite ready to fully commit to Him. Even amongst His closest followers there were those who had issues that were preventing them from reaching full maturity as disciples.

Jesus knew that His time was limited, and He needed to intensify His teachings on the kingdom of God. There were times when Jesus was able to teach His disciples in private, but in those times when the multitudes were listening in, He used the parables of the kingdom to “sift out” those who did not have “eyes to see or ears to hear” the mysteries of the kingdom that were intended only for His disciples to know and understand.

Jesus was not being cruel or heartless by not including the multitudes with the essential knowledge of the workings of His kingdom. On the contrary, He was insulating them from hearing and then rejecting truth they were not ready to receive. There were certain truths that their hearts were too hard, too stony, or too thorny to receive. Those who are called “carnal” Christians:

- **Live according to the flesh** and set their minds on the things of the flesh (Romans 8:5)
- **Live in enmity against God** and cannot please Him (Romans 8:7, 8)
- **Live like “babes in Christ”** even after they have been saved for years (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)
- **Live in judgment of others** in matters of food or in drink, or regarding religious practices (Colossians 2:16, 17)
- **Live in false worship** with a puffed up and fleshly mind that will not hold fast to Jesus Christ, the Head of the church (Colossians 2:19)

**“Wayside Christians”** are those who are unable to receive the word of God because they are not fully submitted to Lord as disciples. They live too close to the world and therefore are worldly and carnal. Paul often addressed such people in his epistles. Those whose hearts have been conditioned by the world are easy to identify. They are controlled by their lower natures and live only to please themselves. Instead of following after the Holy Spirit and seeking first the kingdom of God and righteousness, they find themselves doing those things that please themselves instead of denying the self-life. Instead of picking up their cross daily to die to the self, they are still following after the old nature, which leads to death because the old sinful nature within resists the word of God. Because they never truly believed the truth of God’s word, they never intended to obey the word

of God. The seed of the word of God will remain on the surface and the enemy will quickly snatch away that truth before it has a chance to take root in their hearts. This is why those who are on the wayside are still under the control of their old sinful patterns, and why they are still bent on following their old evil desires. Even though they may be good church attenders and may even be involved in the activities of the church, they only have the outward appearance of being Christians. They can only be considered Christians in name only because their hearts are not devoted to worshiping God in spirit and obeying the truth once it is revealed.

“How is it that this same message of the kingdom so polarized people? As Christians pondered this, they came to see that the kingdom itself, like the Jesus to whom it pointed, is a great mystery. The response to that mystery is what separates the crowds from the disciples – a division made very plain in verse 13:36. And the Christian scribes, men like Matthew himself who were in leadership in the church, needed to understand that mystery if they were to minister effectively.”

To be real, Christian leaders must be able to disciple others with insight and faith that comes only from being disciples themselves. Disciples are those who have believed and received the fundamental doctrines of the faith – repentance from dead works, faith in God, baptisms, prayer, the resurrection of the dead, eternal judgement, etc. (Hebrews 6:1-3) – and have moved on to discovering the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: “Then He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’” (Matthew 13:52).

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON TWO

1. Explain the reasons why Jesus began to teach about the kingdom of God in parables.
2. In what ways do modern methods of presenting the gospel in evangelistic meetings differ from Jesus’ presentation of the gospel? In what ways are they the same?
3. Why are carnal “wayside” Christians not ready to receive the mysteries of the kingdom of God?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-3 THE KEY PARABLE OF “THE SOWER AND THE SOILS”

### The Strongholds

*“Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.”* Matthew 13:5, 6

Jesus never promised His disciples a life of health, wealth, and prosperity in this world as a guaranteed reward for following Him. He did say in Matthew 19:28-30 that “at the renewal of all things” when He sits on His glorious throne, those who have left “houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields” will receive a reward of “a hundred times” and will inherit eternal life. But at the same time Jesus cautions those who strive for the top and seek the highest, and most exalted positions in this life that “many who are first now will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

Jesus never tried to hide the fact that there is a high, high cost to be paid for anyone who wants to be a true disciple of His. And the truth is, any gospel message that at some point does not mention the high cost involved in following Jesus is an incomplete and inadequate Gospel.

An inadequate Gospel message is one that:

- Contains **no explanation** of the radical nature of conversion and the whole life change that must follow it
- Has **no understanding** conveyed to those present that their decision to ask Jesus to forgive them of their sins and be their personal Savior means total submission to Him as the Lord of their life

“In a world where everything revolves around self – protect yourself, promote yourself, preserve yourself, entertain yourself, comfort yourself, take care of yourself – Jesus said, ‘slay yourself.’ And that’s exactly what happened. According to Scripture and tradition, these four fishermen paid a steep price for following Jesus. Peter was crucified upside down, Andrew was crucified in Greece, James was beheaded, and John was exiled. Yet they believed it was worth the cost. In Jesus these men found someone worth losing everything for.”

David Platt

**Evangelists that present a gospel that only promises the blessings of following Jesus without counting the costs may be sincere, but regardless of their sincerity, they are still presenting a totally inadequate picture of what it means to become a disciple.**

The demands of discipleship must be presented from the beginning (Note Luke 9:57-62; Luke 14:25-35) even if it means that when the crowds hear them, they might decide there is too much cost and will seek a better, less demanding way of salvation than the way of a disciple.

If the multitudes are brought into the church with promises of God’s unending and unconditional blessings, the pastors and other church leaders may be tempted to continue week after week preaching the same inadequate gospel message. The longer they wait to preach about the high, high cost of being a follower of Jesus, the more difficult it will be to start. If new converts have been brought into the church believing an inadequate gospel, they may begin to think they have been deceived when they come to realize that all of their illnesses, all of their problems, and all of their needs are not unconditionally taken care of just because they made a confession of faith; they may begin to question if God is really able to do all that has been promised.

Matthew 13:20-21 describes what happens to the seed in the rocky soil and why. A rock can be described as a “hard place” formed by years of intense pressure and heat. When the farmer is out plowing his field, the plow cuts open the soil and exposes the rocks that may be hidden below the surface. Once the rocks become exposed to the sun, they act as “heat magnets” as they absorb the energy of the sun. Rocks have a dual negative effect on the productivity of the soil; (1) the seed might be received into the shallow soil, but there is no place for the roots to sink deep and find the source of water and nourishment (note: Psalm 3). And (2) as the rocks absorb the heat, they dry out the soil and rob the soil of the moisture the seeds need to survive and grow. The plow does the work and cuts open the surface of the soil; it exposes what is hidden below the surface, but it is up to the farmer to remove the rocks from the soil if he wants to have an abundant crop.

“The power must work in us before it will be greatly manifested through us. This is why we have wilderness experiences. God will put up with some things in the wilderness that He won’t tolerate in the Promised Land. But if we can learn to resist sin, we can get out of the wilderness and begin to reign in life.” Bertram L. Gaines

“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh...” Ezekiel 11:19

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”  
Ezekiel 36:26

When we read Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26 we get a clearer understanding of what Jesus was teaching in this parable. Spiritually speaking, a rock can be described as a “**hard place**” or “**stronghold**” in the heart. These strongholds are formed by years of intense pressure caused by repeated patterns of sin and rebellion in a person’s life. Rocky places in the heart resist the Word of God. Other names for some of these rocky places or strongholds are:

- **Stubbornness**
- **Self-Will**
- **Besetting Sins**
- **Uncontrolled Anger**
- **Hatred**
- **Bitterness**
- **Unforgiveness**
- **Jealousy or Envy**
- **Greed**

“Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter – on the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter. Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, more than the living who are still alive. Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

Rocks are strongholds in the disciple’s heart. If they are left alone, they will expand and grow to become **stumbling blocks** that cause them to trip and fall; or they become like millstones that grind down and destroy their faith. When the fire of God’s judgment or the heat of the oppressor comes, the enemy uses these strongholds against the disciple. Verses like Isaiah 31:9; Jeremiah 4:4; Revelation 16:7, 8; and Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 reveal how God’s judgment and the oppression from our enemies cause spiritual strongholds to be exposed.

**Stony places** in the soil represent **unsurrendered places** in the heart of a disciple (Isaiah 31:9). The Lord uses both judgment and persecution to expose those unsurrendered places in the hearts of His disciples; once exposed, the disciple has to remove those stony places through **repentance, surrender, and obedience to the Lord**. Those believers who refuse to face and remove the

strongholds in their hearts and minds believe that Jesus will continually forgive their sins as their “Savior” without any commitment on their part to follow Him as their Lord (Jeremiah 4:4). When Tribulations, trials, and the troubles of this life come upon them; or when persecution (physical or spiritual attacks from the enemy) comes, because the word of God has not taken root in the stony soil of a heart filled with strongholds, the faith of these disciples will wither and die out so they will never reach maturity in Christ (Revelation 16:7-8).

An important part of Jesus’ ministry to His disciples was exposing the strongholds in their hearts and causing them to face them. The same strongholds that affected Jesus’ disciples in the Gospels are the same ones that affect many of His disciples today. Legalism, worldly thought patterns, carnal desires, bad habits, ungodly attitudes, etc. are all part of Adam’s nature and are received through our culture and the “vain traditions” passed down through our parents. (See HANDOUT “Five Warning Passages for “Stony Hearts” found in Hebrews).

Two of Jesus’ disciples stand out in particular as examples of those whose stony hearts had to be dealt with by the Master Discippler. When we review and reflect upon the Gospel stories that describe Peter and Judas, we can make certain observations about those strongholds Jesus exposed and forced them to confront. We can reflect upon the consequences for those who, like Judas, do not deal with their strongholds; and we can also note from Peter’s story the positive results for those who deal with their strongholds.

Everyone knows Judas’ stronghold: greed. The Gospel witnesses tell us plainly that he was a thief and took money that had been given for the needs of Jesus and the disciples. Did Jesus not know that Judas was a thief? Of course He knew. Then why did He give Judas the money bag? To force him to confront his stronghold; had Judas gone to Jesus and begged for mercy and help to overcome his sin and temptation; no doubt he would have found it and would have been delivered. However because Judas refused to deal with this stronghold and kept it buried in his rocky heart, it eventually became a stronghold – a fortification – that Satan moved into and was able to use to control Judas’ actions (John 13:27).

Compare Peter’s actions with Judas’ actions and the stones in their hearts they reveal. What was Peter’s stronghold? Pride. Peter had great pride and thought more highly of himself than the other disciples. He always wanted to be first: the first out of the boat, the first to declare his loyalty to Jesus, the first to answer any question posed by Jesus. His pride would often get him into trouble, and he would often have to be corrected or rebuked by Jesus. One time Jesus had to severely rebuke Peter for arguing with Him: “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus said to Peter, “You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:22-23) Being rebuked like that in front of the other disciples must have stung Peter’s pride. But it was not until the end when

Peter boldly pronounced in front of the entire company that even if everyone else betrayed Jesus, he would remain loyal, that Peter finally went too far out on a limb to not suffer a serious fall (John 13:36-38). We all know the end of that story, as the Lord predicted, before the night was out, Peter had denied Jesus three times. Peter left the scene of Jesus’ trials a broken man; his pride shattered. But that was not the end. In a beautiful moment with Peter, after the resurrection Jesus drew Peter aside and restored him (John 21:15-19). Acts describes a much humbler Peter as one of the early leaders of the church.

When they first come to Jesus, all disciples to one degree or another have stony places in their hearts – some of these are strongholds that are the result of sinful habits and lifestyles practiced over many years. As the disciple begins to walk and live in close proximity to the Lord, the Holy Spirit will begin to expose these hard places (lust, greed, selfishness, anger, unforgiveness, etc.). The Holy Spirit acts like the good farmer that takes the plow and breaks up the hard surface of the ground. The Spirit’s blade of that plow is the double-edged sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) that opens up the heart of the believer and exposes the rocks buried just under the surface. If the believer is like the good farmer, he will pick up and cast aside any stones found below the surface.

When a hard place is found in the heart that resists what the Lord wants to do in the life of the disciple, they are given a choice: the disciple can remove those stony places in the heart that the Holy Spirit exposes or try to bury them again and pretend they do not exist. If they do not remove these stones, they will eventually grow and become strongholds for Satan to move in and take control of their heart. It is hard and painful work to remove the heavy “rocks” from the heart; part of that process is for the Holy Spirit to allow the testing and persecution in the fire of wilderness experiences to expose the true character of His disciples’ hearts.

Judas did not start out wanting to sell out Jesus for a handful of silver. Remember, Judas was one of the disciples who followed Jesus everywhere; he would have seen the miracles and would have been one of those sent to preach the good news and heal in Jesus’ name (Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-24). I imagine when Judas was first given control of the money bag, he had every intention of being honest with it. Then slowly over time more and more of the money in the ministry bag found its way into Judas’ pocket until everything – even what was for the ministry – was designated for his personal use.

It was precisely because Jesus knew that Judas had a problem with greed that he put him in charge of the money bag. Why? To force Judas to confront his problem and deal with it; taking responsibility for the ministry finances exposed his weakness. I am convinced that if Judas had not continued to bury his greed deep in his heart and had sought Jesus’ forgiveness and cleansing help to

overcome, Judas would have had the victory and would not have been the instrument of Jesus' betrayal.

There are other examples of stony hearts besides Peter and Judas. Some other examples of characters from the Scriptures that are examples of those who did or did not remove the stones from their heart are Saul (pride), David (lust), King Ahab (pride, greed, lust for power), Queen Jezebel (idolatry, pride, lust for power) and the list goes on and on. Every disciple of Jesus Christ comes to Him in the beginning with stony places in their sinful heart. As they walk with Him, the Holy Spirit starts to reveal those places so that the disciple can remove them from their heart. Failure to do so will result in these places becoming strongholds for the devil to move in and further resist the work of the Holy Spirit. These strongholds will prevent the Word of God from taking root in the heart of the believer and will eventually lead to their spiritual death.

“For most of us, living the Christian life is as difficult as finding Christ was. Often it's more difficult. Why? Now that we have Christ in us, shouldn't life go much easier? The truth is that we ourselves make it difficult. We complicate it by trying to do what seems perfectly natural once we become a Christian. We try to keep God's law. But trying through our own effort to keep God's law prevents us from experiencing Christ's abundant life, because contrary to most popular teaching, it is the opposite of what God designed us to do.”  
Dan Stone

### BREAKING UP THE STONES

“We are introduced to the breaking process prior to our conversion when the Holy Spirit begins His work of convicting us of sin. He must get us to the place where we are willing to confess, we are lost, unworthy, deserving only of hell. We fight every step of the way. But He continues to wrestle with us until our pride is shattered, our boasting tongue is silenced, and all resistance gone” – William MacDonald, from *True Discipleship*, Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, Kansas, © 1975, p. 120.

In his book, *True Discipleship*, William MacDonald presented **ten necessary attributes** that will be manifested in the life of a disciple who has been truly broken by the Lord.

1. **Repentance, Confession, Apology** – “The broken man is quick to repent. He does not try to sweep sin under the carpet.” The fallen human condition causes us to want to avoid the way of confession that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). (See HANDOUT “Three Human Responses to Sin”).
2. **Restitution** – “Closely connected with this first aspect of brokenness is prompt restitution, wherever it is called for.” The connection between restitution and repentance is closely linked throughout the Scriptures. Leviticus 5:14-19 gives instructions for the guilt offering. This offering was for those who sinned in some way against "sacred property"—the Tabernacle or the priest-hood—as well as for those who unintentionally sinned against someone. In either case, a ram with no defects had to be sacrificed, plus those harmed by the sin had to be compensated for their loss, plus a 20 percent penalty. Even though Christ's death has made guilt offerings unnecessary for us today, we still need to make things right with those we hurt. Read Luke 19:1-10. Describe how Zacchaeus' salvation experience is a role model for restitution in the kingdom.
3. **Forgiving Spirit** – “A third element of brokenness is the willingness to forgive when we have been wronged. In many cases this takes as much grace as apologizing or making restitution.” Out of all the people in the world Christians should be the most forgiving people. Because of all the people in the world, Christians are the ones who have received the fullness of God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness from the cross of Christ. Matthew 6:12 -14; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25, 26; and Luke 23:33, 34 help to summarize Jesus' teachings on forgiveness:
  - As we ask God to forgive us our sins, we must also forgive our debtors. “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:12-14 and Mark 11:25-26)
  - Jesus responded to Peter's question “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” with the astounding revelation “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” meaning perfect, heavenly, and everlasting forgiveness, which is how God forgives us. Then Jesus goes on to further illustrate His teaching with the parable of the “Unforgiving Servant.” In that parable Jesus teaches that because God has forgiven all our sins, we should forgive others. If we do not truly understand or appreciate God's forgiveness for ourselves, we will not or cannot forgive others, which

will lead us to set ourselves above Christ’s law of love. (Matthew 18:21-35)

- The ultimate expression of Christ’s forgiveness that we should model was on the cross when Jesus looked at those who crucified Him and said, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:33-34).

“We delude ourselves if we think that because we have made some decision we are done with it and forever secure in God’s eyes. We delude ourselves if we think that we can lead immoral lives, shack up with partners who are not our spouses, defraud others of their money, take no action to alleviate social ills in our world, and live in constant tension with our children and family members – we delude ourselves... if we think we can live like this and pretend that we are at peace with God and enjoy his Son’s justifying work. Sam McKnight

**4. Enduring Wrong Without Retaliating** – Another aspect of brokenness listed by MacDonald is to possess “the humble spirit that suffers for doing right and does not retaliate.” Isaiah 53:4-9; Matthew 5:38-42; and 1 Peter 2:18-25 remind us Jesus is the example for disciples to imitate. Consider in your own life those times when enduring a wrong without retaliating was the Christlike thing to do. How well did you imitate Christ in that situation?

**5. Repaying Evil With Good** – “An additional advance in the life of brokenness is not only to bear wrong patiently but to reward every wrong with a kindness.” Jesus gave some practical instructions for this principle. Jesus taught us by His words and actions that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Even the unsaved will love those who love them so what good is that? To be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, requires that we step up and be extraordinary by repaying evil for good (Matthew 5:43-48).

Paul continued this theme in his letter to the Romans and reflecting upon Jesus’ teachings added his instructions to the church in Romans 12:9-21. In these verses Paul urged the church to love without hypocrisy; bless those who persecute; repay no one evil for evil; live peaceably with all; so not avenge yourselves; and “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

**6. Honoring Others Above Self** – “...there is a brand of brokenness that esteems others better than one’s self...” Once more the kingdom teachings of Jesus run contrary to everything the world tells us. The world tells us it is the great who are served by the small; the humble that must bow down to the powerful; the

successful ones are better than anyone else. “Not so in My kingdom” Jesus said. The greatest are like the small child: humble, meek, and trusting (Matthew 18:1-4). The first shall be the servant of all (Mark 10:44-45). This world judges greatness by how many people serve you, but in the kingdom, greatness is measured by how many people you serve. Therefore, the Holy Spirit says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” (Philippians 2:3)

“This plan seems so counterintuitive to our way of thinking. In a culture where bigger is always better and flashy is always more effective, Jesus beckons each of us to plainly, humbly, and quietly focus our lives on people. The reality is you can’t share life like this with masses and multitudes. Jesus didn’t. He spent three years with twelve guys. If the Son of God thought it necessary to focus his life on a small group of men, we are fooling ourselves to think we can mass-produce disciples today. God’s design for taking the gospel to the world is slow, intention, simple process that involves every one of his people sacrificing every facet of their lives to multiply the life of Christ in others.” David Platt, Radical

**7. Prompt Obedience** – “God wants us to be broken in accepting and obeying His will.” The call to discipleship is a call to leave everything and give your relationship to the Lord the highest priority. When Jesus calls His disciples, He does not ask them simply to believe in Him or identify themselves with His teachings in some vague way, but when He calls His disciples, He says the same things He said to His first disciples:

- “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Matt. 4:19
- “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God...” Luke 8:10 & Mark 4:11
- “Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick...” Luke 9:1, 2 ff
- “A disciple is not above his teacher, and a servant like his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.” Matt. 10:24, 25
- “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

Matthew 12:46-50 describes the relationship Jesus shared with His disciples. He pointed to his disciples and said, "Look! These are my mother and brothers." Then Jesus went further and said, "Anyone who obeys my Father in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother!"

Disciples are being made in the same way they have always been made – by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through those who have left all to follow Jesus wherever He might lead them. The mysteries of the workings of God's kingdom are not for those on the outside, but are only for those who are fully engaged in developing that intimate relationship with their Lord and Master that discipleship is intended to cultivate. It is when people of God engage in the mission of God through the Spirit of God that they are able to access power and authority over all demons and to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. At the same time, true disciples of Jesus know they are never above the Master. The life of the disciple is to glorify the master, not themselves or their own personal ministries. Those who seek money, possessions, or even spiritual power for themselves cannot walk in the footsteps of their Master, Jesus Christ. It is not the size of our church, or the offering that counts; neither is it the kind or number of healings with signs and wonders that count. The only thing that counts in the kingdom is the purity of the love we show first for the Lord than for one another.

**8. Death To Public Opinion** – "...we need to be brought to a place where we are dead to the world's applause or frowns." The way of the disciple is a lonely road; it is the "narrow way" and the reason why so few enter in is because the demands of following Jesus are so high. Most people follow the easy way – the way that promises no pain, and an abundance of blessings. The easy way will always appeal to the multitudes, but only those who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness will find the narrow "way, truth, and life" of a disciple who is walking in the footsteps of Jesus. (John 1:10, 11; 3:19-21; 15:18-25)

There is a famous poem called, "Footsteps" which appears on posters and other Christian paraphernalia. In that poem, the narrator speaks of a time in their life when they saw only one set of footprints in the sand and wondered where God was in those lonely moments – only to discover that those footprints were Jesus' not his because at that moment when he could go no farther, Jesus carried him. What this poem fails to point out is that the way of the disciple is a way of suffering in this world – easy-chair Christianity does not exist in the Gospel Jesus preached. Yes, thank God, that in those times when one of His disciples feels they can go no farther, Jesus carries them by His Spirit until they can stand on their own two feet once more and follow their Master step-by-step along the way. But make no mistake about it; the path upon which Jesus leads

His disciples is the path that leads to the cross. At the same time, His disciples can rejoice because they know that the tomb is not the end; the way they are on is a way that leads beyond the cross to the resurrection and glory.

"The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Touchstone, New York, N.Y., 1995, © 1959, p. 89

**9. Confessing Others' Sins as Our Own** – "We need to be so broken that we confess the sins of God's people as our own." Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is on relationship of the disciple with the church and with Christ. A disciple cannot help but identify themselves so closely with the other members of the body of Christ that *their* sins become his or her own sins. John 17:20-23 and Isaiah 53:4-6 remind disciples to be like Jesus – the one who took our sins and sorrows and made them his very own. The world will never believe that Jesus came from the Father if we cannot function in unity as one body. Jesus was wounded and bruised for our sins; His body was broken so that we might be healed of all of our sickness and diseases. A disciple of Jesus will feel the weight of sin – their own and others. In Christ, it is not "...each to his own" but it is "one for all and all for one."

**10. Keeping One's Cool in the Crisis** – "The final aspect of brokenness involves poise and equanimity in the crises of life." Jesus' life was far from a peaceful wonderland. Throughout His time of public ministry He had to face a number of crisis situations. He was under constant pressure from the religious authorities of the Jews that wanted to find any excuse to arrest Him and get rid of Him once and for all. Three examples of the kinds of crisis situations Jesus faced and how he handled them can be found in Luke 8:22-25; Matthew 21:12-17; and John 11:1-15.

In Luke's passage Jesus was asleep in the bow of the boat He and the disciples were using to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. While asleep, a large windstorm suddenly came down on the lake and caused waves that threatened to sink the boat. The disciples woke Jesus in a panic believing they were all about to be drowned. But Jesus simply arose and rebuked the wind

and the violent water, and everything was calm once again. “Where is your faith? Jesus asked His astonished disciples.

In Matthew’s passage, Jesus went to the temple of God and fiercely drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple. Even when having to confront the callousness sinful hearts of men who were indifferent to that which He knew was meant to be kept holy and sacred, Jesus was in control. He knew exactly what He was doing and the effect He wanted to have upon the religious leaders by cleansing the Temple of ruffraff. The violence of Jesus’ actions in the Temple is quickly juxtaposed against His peaceful restorations of the blind and lame that came to Him while He was still in the Temple.

The third example of Jesus keeping His cool in a crisis is from John 11:1-15. The news came to Jesus that His dear friend, Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Mary and Martha, was deathly ill. Rather than dropping everything and reacting to the possible death of a friend, Jesus carries on with what He was doing and does not rush to His friend’s side. When He arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has expired and the whole family and friends are in mourning for him. Jesus knew what He was doing and why He delayed. It was for His disciples’ benefit that they would see Jesus’ miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead. In this third example we see how Jesus stays on track with His mission and knows full-well what He is going to do and when. Jesus is always right on time.

**Jesus’ handling of every crisis gives us confidence by knowing that whatever storm we might be facing Jesus is right there with us and is able to save us and restore us.**

“The great danger we face is that we live by the expectations of others; the demands of our culture rather than the priorities that we should set for ourselves as we commune with God.” Peter Maiden

Not every crisis Jesus faced was a “life or death” situation. On more than one occasion Jesus suffered interruptions to His ministry from those who felt their need was particularly urgent. In Matthew 9:18-26; 15:21-28, 29-38 we have examples of people seeking something from Jesus that could have waited. But because Jesus had compassion on everyone regardless of the seriousness of their situation, He was able to quickly reprioritize His mission give attention to everyone who came to Him. He was not distracted by the crowds or the noise because He was focused on what the Father wanted Him to do at all times. When the situation called for an adjustment as was the case in Tyre (Matthew 15:21-28), and on the mountain (Matthew 15:32-39). Jesus was able to change to accommodate those who needed His help. (See HANDOUT “Discipleship Is Not Behavior Modification”).

### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON THREE

1. Luke 9:57-62 and Luke 14:25-35 make it clear that from the beginning Jesus taught the demands of being His disciple. What are the results of not presenting the demands of discipleship from the beginning?
2. Rocky soil represents a heart that as “hard places” formed by years of sin and resisting God’s word. Why is it so important to remove the hard places in the heart of the disciple?
3. Review the stories from the Bible about Saul, David, King Ahab, Queen Jezebel, Peter, Judas and others. Note what were the stony places in their hearts. What were the different results of either removing them or not removing them?
4. Review the Ten Necessary Attributes that will be manifested in the life of a disciple who has been truly broken by the Lord. How do these attributes compare with what is being presented as “Discipleship Training” in the church today.
5. How are the Ten Necessary Attributes in the life of a disciple to be possessed and applied by every disciple?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-4 THE KEY PARABLE OF “THE SOWER AND THE SOILS”

### The Thorns: Money, Sex, and Power

“Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” Matthew 13:22

When this parable of “The Sower and the Soils” is closely examined, a progression begins to emerge. First, there are the seeds sown on the hard soil of the path. These seeds remain on the surface and are snatched away before they can ever take root. Then there are the seeds sown in the rocky soil. These seeds take root, but the shoots die quickly before the plant is formed. Next there are the seeds sown among the thorns. These seeds find good soil, take root, sprout, and grow into a plant, but because of the thorns, they never reach maturity and bear fruit. Applied to the process of discipleship, the pattern reveals that there are those whose hearts are not able to receive the word of the Kingdom, and the enemy snatches away the word from their hearts before it can take root. These Christians are those who are “Christian in name only.” They may attend church upon occasion (for weddings, funerals, or special holidays), but they have no desire to commit themselves to Jesus as their Lord. Next there are those whose hearts are filled with “stones” – strongholds. These Christians are the ones who joyfully receive the words that contain the promises and blessings of the kingdom, but when they discover the cost involved of following Jesus as their Lord, they shrink back, and their faith shrivels and dies. Most of these Christians will eventually leave the church. They will claim that Christianity is a fake – that prayers don’t work and if God exists, He must not be involved with the day-to-day affairs of men. When persecution comes, they will decide the cost of discipleship is just too great and they will go back to their old religion or godless life so they will not have to suffer for being a disciple of Jesus Christ. In either case, because of undisturbed strongholds buried deep within their hearts, these disciples will never discover the fullness of life that kingdom discipleship offers. Those who give up too soon will never know the blessings of a mature spiritual life rooted deeply in a willing heart where living waters of Christ will refresh and nourish them even when the heat of persecution comes upon them.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his

delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” Psalm 1:1-6

“For it is the very nature of the case that all who wish to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Not necessarily, indeed, the persecution of fire, thong, dungeon, stake; but a persecution, it may be, more cruel because more refined – the persecution of smile, sneer, and avoidance. Woe, when all men speak well of you! For in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets.” George Dana Boardman

The progression continues; and the seeds sown among the thorns are those disciples whose hearts have received the word of the kingdom with joy. They have passed through the early tests of their faith and show a degree of growth as Christians, but something is preventing them from going deeper in their walk with God. They reached a certain level of growth, but then choked up and stopped. Now there is little or no spiritual fruit being produced in their life. Jesus was very specific about what causes these disciples to never reach maturity: “**...the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.**”

When Matthew 13:22 is compared with other statements of Jesus about wealth and possessions from His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-4, 19-34), we discover that Jesus presented a **radical lifestyle** for His disciples to follow. We should give generously, but out of pure motives and for eternal rewards. Disciples of Jesus are instructed not to strive to store up treasures here on earth. The things of this world are only temporary, and we cannot take them with us. Whatever is being stored for us in heaven is eternal and never loses its value. Where our treasure is, there is where our heart will be also. So we should set our minds on heavenly things and not strive and fret about things like food, drink, clothes, and money. Jesus reminds His disciples to look at the birds of the air. They do not worry about what to eat – they don’t need to sow seeds, reap the harvest, and store up food. And yet the Lord takes care of them the same as he takes care of the lilies of the field. Since we are of far greater value to God than the birds and the flowers, we can have faith and confidence that the Lord will take care of us also. Worrying

about having enough food and clothing does nothing to bring them to us. God knows what we need before asking, and is faithful to provide all our needs, if not all of our wants and desires. So the Lord’s disciples do not need to be anxious about tomorrow – God will take care of our tomorrows as well as our todays. So we are instructed to live one day at a time.

The guiding principle of all of Jesus’ teachings concerning the things of this world is you cannot serve two masters: **God and money**. For you will hate one and love the other, or else the other way around. If you try and serve both, in the end you will lose both because a true follower of Jesus must be totally focused on the kingdom as the first and only place where His blessings are found.

“Saint Francis and his followers didn’t view simplicity as a specialized discipline for monks or other unusual individuals seeking advanced degrees in enlightenment. Instead, they saw it as the garden from which all other spiritual virtues grow, and as a prerequisite to our being both fully human and fully spiritual.” John Michael Talbot

Jesus had much to say about wealth and possessions. He began His Sermon on the Mount describing the  **blessings of the kingdom**  (Matthew 5:2-11). It may be a surprise to many of His disciples in wealthy and prosperous nations that not one of those kingdom blessings included the health, wealth, and success that so many Christians in prosperous nations have been taught are their birthright. It is difficult for those who enjoy so many of the riches and comforts of this life to see them as Jesus sees them: thorns – sharp, pointed objects projecting from the stems of trees and bushes that in the shadows pierce and catch the tender fleshy leaves on the branches, preventing them from breaking free into the light of the sun and bursting forth with fruit. But Jesus’ disciples were never called to live a life of complacent contentment while countless millions suffer without hope.

“When Jesus teaches this crowd that they must give up everything they have to follow him, he is developing what he has said about the necessity of the cross bearing and of dying to self. Everything must go; all that we previously relied upon, the things that we took pride in. We must now see such things as rubbish.” Peter Maiden

God wants to prosper His people it is true; but not for them to waste their riches on selfish, self-indulgence, but to use to bless others. Jesus never described this as the “ideal” for some who wanted to follow him, but it was and is still today the normal Christian life. Read Matthew 19:16-22. Note how the rich young man was willing to go just so far with the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. But like the

one who received seed among the thorns, although he heard the word of the kingdom straight from Jesus’ mouth, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choked the word as it was spoken to him. He could not receive it; and in the end, although he had great wealth, he was an unfruitful branch in the kingdom.

Luke 13:6-9 is Jesus’ parable about a certain man who had a fig tree in his garden. When the time came for him to find fruit on the tree, he found none. He turned to the keeper of his vineyard and ordered him to chop down the fruitless tree. “Look,” he said, “for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and found none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?” But the keeper of his vineyard pleaded with him, “Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.” The master had the right to expect fruit from this tree and was not unreasonable to cut down the tree after three years of waiting for it to produce. But of course, we know that Jesus was not talking about figs and trees here.

True discipleship requires  **counting the cost of following Jesus** . And that cost is nothing less than  **everything** . However, not everyone is able to bear this cost from the moment of salvation. The Father has every right to expect fruit to be produced by His people. However, because of His Son’s grace and mercy, He gives disciples time to grow and mature. But the time comes in the life of every disciple when the Lord will require the produce of a life surrendered to Him. This is why the ground must be broken up, the rocks removed, and the thorns must be rooted out. Like the tree in the parable of Luke 13:6-9, the disciple must dig around the roots of the healthy plant and remove the weeds ( **remove anything from the heart that will rob their spiritual life** ), fertilize – feed or enrich – the heart with the  **word of God** , which is the bread of life. So that in the end they will become a fruitful, seed bearing, disciple able to reproduce and make other disciples.

Removing the thorn bushes is not the end of the process for the disciple:

- “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. John 15:1-5
- “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in

Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.” John 16:7-15

John 15:1-5; and 16:7-15 describe the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the heart of the disciple. In order to reach full maturity in Christ the disciple must **“abide” or live in Christ**. In other words, our entire being is attached to Him. Discipleship is not a Sunday only proposition with God. To be a disciple of Jesus means we learn to live out of the life of Christ in us 24/7. The life of the branch is the life of the vine. When the branch is attached to the vine, the life-force of the vine flows into the branch and it bears much fruit. Apart from Christ, spiritually we become a dried-up branch and are good for nothing but to be thrown into the fire. The Father is the vinedresser who examines every branch and removes anything from it that will hinder the growth of the branch. And He removes any branch that takes from the vine without producing anything good in return. The Holy Spirit is **“God’s truth detector”** – that means the Holy Spirit is the one who brings to our attention anything that needs to be pruned, cut out, and removed from our life – anything that will inhibit **fruit-bearing** on our part.

The call to discipleship begins with God’s gracious calling: “Follow me,” Jesus says, “and I will make you...” But, like Abraham, whose call required obedience to “go” where God sent him, and like the first disciples Jesus called, those who are called as disciples today must also **participate in that call**. Our participation in the call is to be diligent to **“seek first the kingdom of God and righteousness.”** The disciple needs to honestly ask, “Have I done all I should have done?” “Have I been diligent to seek God with a whole heart?” If the answer to either is “no” then it is a signal for the disciple to look closely at their heart and see what needs to be pruned or rooted out.

“Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’  
And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’  
Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’

Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’  
And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’  
But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” Luke 9:57-62

Luke 9:57-62 tells us there are no half-measures with Jesus. Although each of these men who wanted to follow Jesus had different issues, but they all lacked the total dedication needed to follow Jesus. There are no half-hearted disciples in the kingdom of God. Yes, thank God, that salvation is the free gift of His grace, received by faith in the finished work of His Son on the cross. But it is also true that the cost of following Jesus is **nothing less than everything**. We must accept the cross of **self-denial and sacrifice** along with the crown or we never reach the end of the road with Jesus.

“The Lord Jesus never tried to coax men into a glib profession of faith. Neither did He seek to attract a large following by preaching a popular message. In fact, whenever people began to swarm after Him, He would turn to them and sift them by setting forth the sternest terms of discipleship.” William MacDonald, *True Discipleship*, Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, KS, © 1975, p. 68.

All of those men mentioned in Luke 9:57-62 had the same issue: they wanted to **set their own terms and conditions** for following Jesus. Jesus is Lord; and He alone sets the terms for following Him. The call to discipleship is a call to **total commitment** to the Master; only then will it transform every area of the disciple’s life. There is no other call for the Christian.

“The world seeks through a million marketing messages every day, to conform our thinking to its standards. Most of us are more influenced by these messages than we realize. We will, in fact, either be conformed or transformed. Jesus isn’t merely interested in conforming – changing the appearance and behavior of people. He’s interested in transformation. Transformation is more than a surface-level alteration; it’s actually becoming something else entirely.” Eric Geiger

At the moment of salvation, believers receive the Lord Jesus Christ into their lives. His Spirit takes residence within them, and their body becomes the living temple in which His Spirit abides (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). That means for

the disciple, Salvation must be more than forgiveness of sins; it must lead them to **whole life transformation** (Romans 12:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:20, 21). And whole life transformation is a process by which the Holy Spirit works from within the heart to make the disciple like his Master in every way.

Salvation in Christ Jesus is more than a single event that takes place when a person prays a “sinner’s prayer” asking God to forgive their sins; it is a whole life of discipleship – a process that transforms the entire life of the disciple into the image and likeness of Christ. That transformation comes only as the disciple submits their very being to the Lord’s **rule and authority** in every area of their life. They say as Jesus said, “...not my will but Thy will be done.”

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’” Mark 8:34 (NIV). Jesus was never deceptive about what it would cost to follow Him; it is a call to self-denial. The life of discipleship is not the way to wealth and comfort in this world. Read Luke 14:25-33. Jesus will not allow anyone to who comes to Him to follow Him on their own terms. Jesus is Lord; that means HE sets the terms and conditions for His disciples, and the terms and conditions He sets are nothing less than everything.

“Christianity is not a religion, it’s a relationship.” How many times have we heard this Christian cliché? Yes, the Son of God invites us to a relationship with Him, but exactly what kind of relationship? Being a Christian means entering into a **master-disciple** relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. A disciple must have a personal allegiance to Jesus that transcends all other relationships.

1 Kings 19:19-21 describes Elisha’s actions when he was called to be Elijah’s disciple:

“So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, ‘Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.’ And he said to him, ‘Go back again, for what have I done to you?’

So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.”

Elisha the son of Shaphat belonged to a wealthy family (indicated by the twelve yoke of oxen). When Elijah “cast his mantle upon him” it was a sign of Elisha’s calling to adopt the prophetic office of his master. When Elijah asks,

“What have I done to you?”, it was intended to be a reminder to Elisha that the solemn ceremony just performed was an irreversible call for him to immediately leave every earthly affection and obey his call. “So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.” 1 Kings 19:21 is Elisha’s ceremony that completely breaks all thorny ties to his previous life.

Being a disciple means **leaving everything behind**. The disciple leaves mother, father, brothers, sisters, spouse, and children. The disciple detaches his affections to everything of the old life and attaches himself to the master. That means from that point forward, they go where the master goes; they eat what the master eats; they sleep where the master sleeps; and they do everything the master does. The master teaches them everything he knows so that in time they think the way the master thinks. And when their training is complete, the disciple becomes indistinguishable from his master. Then the disciple goes out and becomes the master and makes other disciples like the Master in the same way. And so the process goes on and on. **Only those disciples who remove all the thorns from their life – those worldly attachments – will reach full maturity in Christ and be able to produce the fruit of making more disciples.**

It is important to note at this time that the calling of the disciple is to remove the thorns and break every affection with the old life, but not necessarily every relationship with everyone. The call of discipleship is a call to cut every cord that prevents the disciple from putting Jesus first in their life. That might mean severing physical relationships with those who would cause them to stumble – who would constantly tempt them to engage in the sinful patterns of behaviors of their old life before they started following Christ (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). It might mean severing spiritual ties with those who are engaged in idol worship or some other religion, but that does not necessarily mean severing all family ties if there are still healthy lines of communication open; it simply means **not participating** with them in idol worship (or any other form of false worship). It can also mean severing ties with anyone or anything of the old life that will come between the disciple and the master. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, Paul gives sound spiritual advice for believers in how to handle **marriage relationships**. Every disciple must evaluate for themselves every relationship and every attachment to the things of this world and **reorder their priorities** in such a way that they are able to obey Christ’s commandments found in Matthew 22:37-39: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind... and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

In the case of Elisha, his family and friends knew exactly what he was about to do and showed their consent through their participation in his farewell

ceremony. A casual observer might conclude that Elisha “hated” his mother, father, his life, etc. based upon his actions of severing ties and burning his oxen. However, looking at it from another perspective, the conclusion is that Elisha so loved the Lord and was so dedicated to his master, the great prophet of the Lord, that his actions only appeared to be “hateful” to those on the outside who did not understand the great privilege it is to serve the Lord completely (Note: Luke 14:26).

The “cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches” are all wrapped up in three things that make this world go around: money, sex, and power. In one way or another, and in one combination or another, the desire for these things becomes the thorns of life to the disciple. The **pursuit and acquisition** of these things quickly become distractions that choke the Word of self-sacrifice necessary for spiritual growth and will stop the disciple from reaching their full potential in Christ. It does not matter where the disciple comes from, or whether they are rich or poor – every disciple will have to contend with each of these issues throughout their lifetime.

“The great danger we face is that we live by the expectations of others: the demands of our culture rather than the priorities that we should set for ourselves as we commune with God.” Peter Maiden

In Matthew 19:23-26 and again in Luke 12:13-34 there is only one conclusion we can draw about the low priority of gaining wealth for the disciple. When we hear Jesus saying, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven...” and “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God...” also, “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail...” it is difficult, if not impossible to line these words up with the popular prosperity teachings of the church in modern industrialized nations.

During the second half of the twentieth century, in industrialized Western countries, consumerism became the dominant cultural and economic force that propelled them to the heights of prosperity. Every year advertisers spend billions of dollars to convince people they need to go out and buy the latest products designed to make their lives easier and more comfortable. In America shopping malls have become as popular a meeting place on Sundays as the local church. Eventually, social scientists began to ask if consumerism had become the new religion of the twenty-first century. In his book, *Discipleship*, Peter Maiden wrote excellent chapters on the relationship between the disciple and money, sex, and power.

Money, Sex, and Power are “The Big Three” arenas where the disciple’s faith and loyalty to Jesus are constantly tried, tested and proven. This is nothing new. In Acts 5:1-11; Acts 8:9-24; and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 these same issues were being addressed in these early believers. If you think about it, every temptation and every sin is related in one way or another to the abuse of these things. The Christian who is not actively **dying to self** will quickly and easily turn away from the hard and narrow road of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ and turn to the broad way in pursuit of one or more of these three things. Matthew 6:24 and Romans 6:16.

“For many people, tragically their self-worth is to some degree dependent on their ability to purchase. So people will work the kind of hours that damage other areas of their lives, or run up debts that will ultimately become a huge burden, in order to be up with the crowd. The prophets of our consumer age drone on, promising that all you need for ultimate satisfaction is the latest gizmo but it is like drinking sea water: the more we fall for the lie, the more thirsty we become.”  
Peter Maiden

Jesus was perfect and blameless in each of these areas of money, sex, and power. However, He understood their value and their necessity to live on this Earth. He recognized they were “gifts” from God and a blessing when used as they were intended but were terrible “masters.” And when any of these are abused, they very quickly turn from being our servants into being our masters.

## MONEY

To illustrate the power of money, I will tell the story of a pastor friend of mine in India. One time we were about to depart from his home in West Bengal for some ministry in another state. Before we left for the train station, he and his wife were going through the final checklist of everything we needed for the journey. At one point he asked his wife if she had “Satan” with her. I was taken aback and wondered if I heard correctly. Seeing the puzzled look on my face, he smiled and said, “Satan is my word for money.” At that moment, I had a new respect for this pastor, and it started a whole new thought process in me about money.

If you think about it, money is very much like the devil. Money will make the disciple do things they never thought they would do. It will cause otherwise honest people to lie, cheat, steal from each other and from God. The love of money and the things it will buy has been the cause of countless leaders in the church falling into sin. It has been argued by many leaders in the church today that the gross consumerism of twentieth century American pop culture has done more to

destroy the church from within than any other opponent from the outside. Paul said as much in 1 Timothy 6:10 “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (NIV)

“Is consumerism the religion of the twenty-first century? The shopping center is now the place of worship for many on a Sunday morning.” Peter Maiden

1 Kings 10:14-29 contains a description of Solomon’s great wealth. By the world’s standards Solomon would be considered a successful king. However, when we read 1 Kings 11:1-8 we can see that by the Lord’s standards Solomon would not be considered a successful king because he allowed his great wealth and prosperity to turn his heart from God and he lost the kingdom for future generations. So, be careful what you ask for. When you ask God to “open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing” of health, wealth, and prosperity upon you (Malachi 3:10) all those things may be the very instruments that will lead to your spiritual downfall.

In the end it was Solomon’s great wealth that gave him the ways and means to obtain his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines! And as Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart away from being fully devoted to God, which then turned his heart after other gods and brought God’s judgment upon his house and eventually upon all of Israel. There are countless examples from the Scriptures and from contemporary life that illustrate how material abundance can turn away from pure devotion to God the hearts of even the Lord’s most devoted servants. Disciples should treat money the same way they treat the devil and follow the Lord’s advice, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16 NIV). “No. No. No. That will never happen to me.” are the famous last words of many a prosperous Christian who ended up surrounded in comfort and ease, skipping church, not reading their Bible; and their devotional life a pale shadow of what it was in their youth all because of the deceitfulness of the riches that brought them comfort and ease.

Any casual observer of 21st century American Christians will have to conclude that there is something terribly lacking in our churches today. Years of materialism and gross consumerism, fueled by massive debt have taken their toll. The prosperity of the “American Dream” has meant that far too many are being content without God; and far too many who have been left behind by that dream have turned to unethical and – in some cases – criminal behaviors to obtain it. As the years of excess and waste on a massive scale take their toll, more and more

people are being left behind by the American Dream and are buried in consumer debt, paying high interest loans which eat away their incomes. They have to work more and more for less and less and find little left at the end of the week for God. This is the devil’s scheme and he is very successful at ensnaring disciples in the thorns of materialism, which will keep them from developing a mature lifestyle of using the blessings of health, wealth, and prosperity not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the kingdom, and for the benefits of others as God intended. This is His divine purpose for giving them those blessings in the first place.

1 Timothy 6:4<sup>b</sup>-5, 17-19; and James 2:1-13 teach us the godly attitude of heart of the disciple who has truly let go of the desire for riches in this world. Godliness is **not** intended to be a means to gain in this world. The rich are not to be proud and not trust in their money because some day it will be gone. Those who know what true riches are will place their trust in the living God who always richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Disciples of the kingdom will know how to use their money to do good without hypocrisy attached to it. They will know the value of being rich in good works and will give happily to those in need. Those who have the kingdom mindset about money will always be ready to share with others whatever God has given them. They will see wealth as something to use on earth in such a way to store up real treasure for themselves in heaven. The priorities of those whose hearts are right will be to live a fruitful Christian life down here as well. (See HANDOUT “Disciples Honor the Lord with Their Wealth”)

The condition of the thorny heart makes it all wrapped up in the things of this world. They will see money as a means to their own selfish ends. The love of money in the church has led to what Paul told Timothy would happen “...unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.” Philippians 4:12-13 describes how you can tell if a disciple’s heart is free. Paul had learned the secret of how to be content in every circumstance. Because Christ was with him, Paul felt he could do all things and be content in every situation.

“... are we bringing everything we have to him with this attitude of stewardship; this understanding that we now live, and use everything we have, with the desire for his glory? Everything must be submitted to his Lordship. ‘Jesus is Lord’ was the simple but utterly radical first Christian creed.” Peter Maiden

True discipleship requires a radical change in attitude about money and possessions: for the disciple it is NOT a 90%-10% proposition the Lord is offering; it is not even a 50-50 proposition with God. It is nothing less than a 100%-to-zero proposition. 100% belongs to God and everything the disciple has must be used for only one purpose: to glorify God. For the true disciple the issue of money is not “how much do I keep?” but is “How much can I give away?”

“It would be simpler if Christians were called to vows of poverty. If we knew that it was God’s will that none of us own cars; that all of us were allowed precisely two sets of underwear, one set of outerwear and \$50 a month rent, one pair of slippers and one pair of shoes, we would all know where we stood. But Jesus does not make it that easy. His teaching about giving away a second suit is not an attempt to set maximum living standards.” John White, *The Cost of Commitment*

However, just because a person lives in a less prosperous country where life is much harder and consumer goods are scarce, it does not make them immune from the same cares of this world. Those who are hungry and full of desires to obtain a piece of the wealth that the rich enjoy can just as easily allow the “deceitfulness of riches” to distract them and keep them from receiving the word of the kingdom, making their spiritual life unfruitful. Rich or poor, the life of the disciple is no longer their own, but His; the Lord who is Creator and Redeemer is still the rightful Owner of everything they have. And whether they are a manager over one talent or ten makes no difference, the disciple is called to be a good and faithful steward and manage everything they have for His kingdom and glory.

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON FOUR

1. Review Jesus’ teachings from His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7). Summarize His teachings on “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.”
2. Read Matthew 6:24 and Romans 6:16. What happens when money, sex, or power become more important than God in the life of the believer?
3. Being a good steward is honoring the Lord with your wealth. How does the disciple honor the Lord with their wealth?

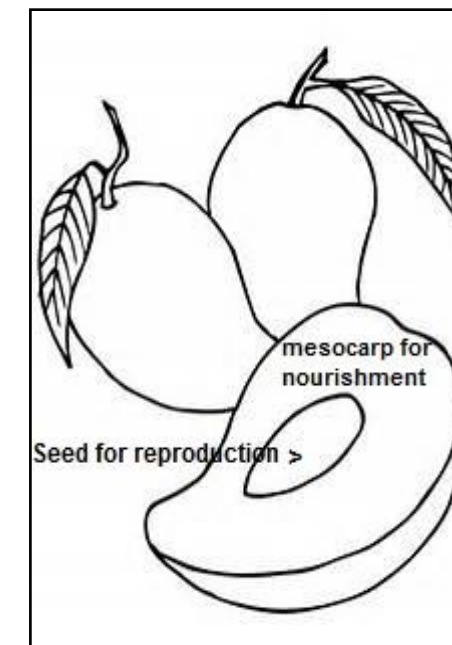
## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-5 THE KEY PARABLE OF “THE SOWER AND THE SOILS”

### The Good Soil – A Heart Prepared to Receive

*“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” Matthew 19:23*

Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33; 21:19; and Luke 13:6-7 make it clear that the Lord’s expectation is that His disciples should be **bearing fruit** for the kingdom. Those who are truly disciples of His will bear the good fruit of the Spirit: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** (Galatians 5:22-23).

Following the progression of the parable of “The Sower and the Soils” from the hard surface to the rocky, thorny, and then good soil, the good, fertile soil is **free of all obstructions** to the receiving, sprouting, growing, and fruit-bearing of a healthy tree. True disciples will produce fruit for the kingdom – but not just any fruit, but fruit **after its kind**. Therefore, Christlike disciples will in turn produce Christlike disciples. A good tree will produce good fruit, and by their fruits you will know who is of the good soil. Half-hearted, uncommitted, and worldly Christians will only produce the same, but true disciples have the seed of the kingdom within their fruit. “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... as well as “righteousness and truth” (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9). Remember, the fruit is NOT the seed – it is what bears the seed. The fruit is useful for food, but the seed is for reproduction.



Note the purpose of the fruit in the natural world and how it relates to the fruit in the spiritual realm of the kingdom. In the natural world, the fruit has two parts: the outer, fleshy part that is intended for consumption and the seed which is intended for reproduction. The outer fleshy, *mesocarp* of the fruit is intended to give strength, health, and nourishment to the person that consumes it. The seed is intended for reproduction of the fruit-bearing plant, or tree. The same is true of the fruit of the Spirit: the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians

12:1-11; 14:12) are for the building up or edification of the church, the body of Christ; it is also for the reproduction of fruit-bearing disciples (Ephesians 3:5-7; 4:4-7; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 2 Timothy 1:3-11).

***Producing a good harvest requires three things:***

- (1) **Good (fertile) soil** which is a heart that is “born again” with the life of the Spirit of God within. That is why Jesus said, “You must be born again.” A heart without the life of God within is sterile and incapable of nourishing and sustaining the life of the seed sown into it.
- (2) **Properly Prepared:** The good soil must be prepared by plowing up the hard surface, removing any hidden rocks or “hard places” that will prevent the seeds from taking root. Properly prepared soil allows the rain to saturate the soil and not run off causing erosion. Once the crop starts to grow, the thorns or thistles that will thrive in the good soil must be cut back and removed so they will not rob the good, fruitful plants of nutrients, or overshadow them, preventing the good, fruit-bearing branches from receiving the life-giving rays of the sun that are necessary for good, healthy fruit to burst forth.  
Spiritually speaking, the disciple must participate in the process by preparing their heart as a “habitation” for the Lord. The self-life must be broken (denied) and the sinful heart plowed up by the double-edged sword of the Spirit. All those hidden strongholds must be exposed – those hard places in the heart that resist the word of the kingdom. Once exposed, the strongholds must be dealt with and removed by the disciple – with the help of the Holy Spirit. The worldly pleasures and material comforts will choke the word of self-sacrifice and self-denial; they will prevent the disciple from pressing on to reach maturity. The thorns must be cut back and rooted out. Here is where another of the great mysteries of kingdom discipleship is discovered: in the cutting and pruning (*sanctifying*) from the disciple of every weight and the sin that so easily entangles their life and keeps them from reaching maturity (full fruit-bearing) in Christ.
- (3) **Good seed** is necessary to produce a good crop; but the good seed must “die” in the soil before the new life within can be released and the fruit-bearing plant can come forth. This is the place where the way, truth, and life of the kingdom intersects with the heart of the disciple.

Juan Carlos Ortiz said it best: “Discipleship is more than getting to know what the teacher knows. It is getting to be what he is.” When anyone responds to

Jesus’ command to follow Him, it is a lifelong journey of discipleship that calls for the ultimate in self-denial. Because this journey led Jesus to the cross, it must also lead His disciples to the same place – the disciple follows wherever the master leads: “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish” (John 21:18). All those who follow Christ as true disciples must accept the fact, that it will lead them to **the cross of dying to self.**

However, the disciples of Jesus know that the cross is not the final destination. Jesus rose from the dead and because He lives, whoever follows Him will also live. In Romans 6:3-11 Paul states the case very clearly. Sin’s power was broken by the cross of Christ. When we first believed and were baptized sin no longer had control over us through the sin nature. Through Jesus Christ’s death, the power of the sinful nature was shattered once and for all. Paul reminds us in this passage of Romans that our old sin nature was buried with Christ by baptism and when God the Father raised Jesus to new life, we who believe are given a new life with Him. Spiritually, we have become one with Christ, and so we died with Him when He died; and now we share in His new life and shall be resurrected with Him in the end. Our old evil desires were nailed to the cross of Christ so the part of us that loves to sin was crushed. Therefore, we are no longer under the control of the sin-loving body and are no longer to consider ourselves slaves to sin, but now are slaves to righteousness in Christ Jesus when we follow Him as true disciples. It is because the old sin-loving nature died with Christ, that we are now confident of sharing His new life in the Spirit. Jesus Christ rose from the dead and lives forever. He died once for all to end sin’s power over anyone believes in Him. Because He lives forever in unbroken fellowship with God, we now have the hope that at the resurrection, we too will enjoy an unbroken fellowship with God. “So look upon your old sin nature as dead and unresponsive to sin, and instead be alive to God, alert to him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:11 (TLB)

The ultimate destination of the Incarnate Christ was not the cross but was the **resurrection and the life** that followed after it (Ephesians 1:15-23). This other life is “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.” that Paul wrote about in Colossians 1:26-29. This other life is NOT for self-glory but is for HIS glory (Philippians 1:9-11). Our dying with Christ leads to our glorification with Christ – first in this life, as His disciples reflecting the glory of Christ within, and then in the future at the resurrection of the living and the dead. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16 reveals another mystery of the resurrection: we who have been born again have God’s glory within, which makes us the living, breathing temples of His Holy Spirit upon the earth. Because we have

been born again and have God’s glory within, we can set our sights on the rich treasures and joys of heaven where Christ sits in the place of honor and power. Now we live in the present reality of Christ in us, which means knowing our real life is in heaven with Christ and God. And when Jesus Christ who is our real life returns to this earth in His fullness, the promise for us is at that time we will shine with him and share in all his glories (Colossians 3:1-4).

The blood of Jesus shed upon the cross for the remission of sins is of first and foremost importance because without the Atonement of the Lamb of God, there would be no hope – nothing but death staring in the face of every person born on this earth. (2 Thessalonians 1:10-12; 2:13-14). What the resurrection means is that death is not the end of the story. There is more – much, much more beyond the cross; that is the life we have been saved for. The gospel of salvation, which is the three-day work of death, burial, and resurrection, is only the beginning; it is the “crossing over” from death to life; it is threshold to this other life. The promise of the Holy Spirit within the heart of the born again believer is the rest of the gospel that Jesus preached for three and one half years.

The good news of the kingdom and three-day work of the cross are integral parts of the gospel of the salvation – they are inseparable. If the events of the three-day work of Christ upon the cross, in the tomb, and at the moment of His resurrection, were the totality of the gospel, then it would make the salvation of fallen man an end in itself – then everything from Genesis 1:1 onwards becomes *only* about mankind’s salvation from death, hell, and the grave – case closed. However, when the life beyond the resurrection is factored in, the focus of the gospel shifts from mankind’s salvation *from* sin as the central focus of the gospel to the work of the Holy Spirit that comes after. Salvation is for the transformation of those who have been redeemed and to prepare them for eternal life. The resurrection shifts the focus of salvation from what we have been saved *from* to what we have been saved *to*: being transformed to His glory, by His glory, and for His glory as the centerpiece of His salvation.

“...having your sins forgiven doesn’t tell you one thing about how to live the life. The only thing it says is after you commit a sin, you are forgiven. You don’t know anything yet about true life – God’s life. So life to you is still external: ‘How do I do it?’ Give me a plan; give me a method; give me a scheme.” Dan Stone

#### HOW WE GLORIFY GOD

“A disciple is a person who learns to live the life his teacher lives.”  
Juan Carlos Ortiz

Disciples in Jesus’ day would spend time with their master, usually moving in and living with him. In time they would have the mind of the teacher/rabbi. They began to think as he thought and see life the way their teacher saw it; their worldview became that of their teacher. But their training was not complete until they became everything he was. Becoming a disciple was not an end in itself; one did not become a perpetual disciple who never left the master. Discipleship always has the end goal in mind – that goal is for the disciple to complete their training and become so like the master that others could not distinguish disciple from master in word or action. (See HANOUT “Kingdom Discipleship Illustrated in Peter’s Story”).

The same is true for disciples of Jesus today. As the disciple spends time with Jesus, with His word, and with other disciples in community, Jesus sows the good seed of the gospel of the kingdom into their heart. As the seed takes root and grows, they not only begin to embrace Jesus’ worldview, but they begin to model the character of their Master. Which means the impact of true discipleship upon the disciple’s lifestyle must be absolutely radical and be counter to every human effort of “trying to live for Jesus” out of their own strength.

In his book *Discipleship*, Peter Maiden wrote: “The discipleship relationship is, at its heart, a love relationship...the moment we realize who Jesus is and what he has done for us, total commitment to him is the only life that makes any sense.” (Authentic Books, Secunderabad, India, © 2007, p.20).

So, when Jesus says “come follow me”, the disciple responds not out of compulsion, but willingly, and leaves all to follow Jesus wherever He leads. The disciple’s love for Jesus is what motivates them to want to learn all they can and obey His word (John 14:21). After his great failure, Peter was restored to His Master because of the love relationship they shared.

Incorporated into His restoration of Peter was the command to lovingly care for His sheep. In some of His last words to His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus clearly commanded His disciples to love one another: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). Love is the only thing that makes the master/disciple relationship with Christ work; without love, obedience becomes at best legalism. But more often, without love, obedience becomes too great of a burden, and the disciple backslides into a life of license fueled by the delusion of a “cheap grace” that says God loves the sinner in despite of their sins. In the following chapters we will begin to examine the terms of discipleship that Jesus taught:

- A Supreme Love for Jesus Christ
- A Deliberate Choosing of the Cross
- A Life Spent Following Christ

- **A Fervent Love for All Who Belong to Christ**
- **An Unswerving Continuance in His Word**
- **Forsaking All To Follow Him**

#### A NEW COMMAND

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:36-40

When Jesus answered the question posed to Him, “which is the great commandment of the law?” He was not making a bold new statement intended to overturn everything that had come before. In fact He was quoting directly from the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). Later, when Jesus said in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” He was giving a new commandment for all of His disciples: that they should love one another so that “...all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (v 35).

When we fully examine the life of Jesus in the Gospels, we realize that His lifestyle was so radically different from all the people around Him that it became utterly unacceptable to the religious authorities and to His Jewish brethren. The demands of discipleship were a major reason why they wanted to get rid of Him. The demands of the Pharisees were hard enough, but when Jesus said that entrance to His kingdom required a righteousness that exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20) hearts sank and the righteous ones tore their robes in complete shock. “How can this be?” all would ask. Some because they thought no one could be more righteous than they; others because they did not understand that the righteousness Jesus was speaking about was an inward righteousness that comes from the heart. But all who are truly disciples of Jesus will know that love is what makes the heart of the disciple the **“good soil”** which is able to receive and retain the seed of the gospel sown into it. It is love that exceeds the righteous demands of the scribes and Pharisees and that enables the disciple to forsake all, persevere through the trials and hardships of this life, and press on to the high calling of God in Christ.

Paul is one of the greatest examples we have of what it takes to follow Jesus wholeheartedly (but there are many, many examples from the beginning and leading up to our own day). By the way the Gospel is preached today, you would

think that either Paul was the worst example of a faithless Christian or had his theology all messed up because rather than gaining the praise of the world and filling his life with the best this world has to offer, instead he suffered the loss of all things in life for the sake of following Jesus Christ with a whole heart (Philippians 3:7-14). “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.” Everything this world has to offer, Paul counted as “rubbish” that He might “gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith...” Unlike many in our churches today, Paul’s faith in Jesus did not mean the attainment of the praise and riches of this world, but meant the loss of those things in order to “lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me...” It was for this prize that Paul pressed onward to obtain: “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Those who preach a Dominion Theology of power, position, and prosperity for the church in this age must be put to shame by the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33. (See HANDOUT “What is Dominion Theology”). The life of the disciple was never supposed to be a life of comfort and ease. Jesus warned His disciples: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19) It takes the overcoming love of God within to withstand the world’s hatred.

Think about Paul’s life. He had every reason to boast about his accomplishments and his station in life as a devout, highly educated, and religious Jew. And yet he considered it all loss compared to knowing Jesus. Paul suffered greatly for his faith and obedience to Christ. And yet he considered his suffering as reason to rejoice. **Without love, being a disciple of Jesus will be too great of a hardship – the price will be too high.** On more than one occasion Jesus warned His disciples to expect the world’s hate and not their praise. Of course, even when a disciple is motivated by love, there will be hard times, of disappointment, and times when we will suffer in this world because we have chosen to walk in the footsteps of our Master. Although Jesus warned us that the world hated Him and would no doubt hate all those who followed Him, when our motives are right, we will understand that being a disciple of Jesus is a privilege and blessed are those who suffer because of their love and loyalty to Him (Matthew 5:10-12). Because following Jesus is an offer (or invitation) and not a demand disciples must carefully consider the commitment necessary to follow Him all the way to the end of their lives.

“If we refuse to take up our cross and submit to suffering and rejection at the hands of men, we forfeit our fellowship with Christ and have ceased to follow him. But if we lose our lives in his service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ. The opposite of discipleship is to be ashamed of Christ and his cross and all the offence which the cross brings in its train.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**Our service to the Lord only gets too hard when our motives and priorities get off track** – when we see our Christian service as a means to advance ourselves instead of Jesus; or when we look at Christian service as a way to gain some kind of advantage for ourselves, as a means to promote ourselves, or our profession. It is then that being a servant/disciple of Jesus becomes competitive and relational tensions grow between members of the body who are seeking to advance themselves over others. Jesus had to deal with wrong attitudes of service even among His own disciples. In one case the mother of James and John went to Jesus on behalf of her sons and asked that they be allowed to sit at Jesus’ right and left hands (Matthew 20:20-28). Without realizing what they were being asked, the sons answered that they were able to drink the cup that Jesus was about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that Jesus was about to be baptized. Jesus told them that they would indeed drink their Master’s cup and experience His baptism, but they would not discover what that meant for many years to come. When the other disciples were angry after hearing of what James and John wanted, Jesus ended the argument by telling them “...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

“Now John answered Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.’” Mark 9:38-41

When a disciple’s heart is made of “good soil” they will quickly realize that “It’s not about me.” that a disciple is a servant – even more, a slave. Yes, we are no longer strangers, but Jesus calls us His friends (John 15:15). And yes, we have

been adopted as sons and daughters and made heirs of the promises of Abraham (Galatians 4:7), but that does not change the fact that Jesus is still King of kings and Lord of lords. It does not alter the fact that Jesus bought us by paying the ultimate price. So for us to love and serve Him with everything we have is not heroic or extraordinary; it should be the normal response of a person who understands more about who Jesus is and appreciates more what he has done on their behalf. Because Jesus held nothing back and gave everything He had for us, discipleship requires from us the highest commitment, and we should hold nothing back for Jesus. Because He graciously calls us His friends and because we are called sons and daughters of the Most High God, our service to Him and to others in His name is an honor and not a burden. But those who are looking for a savior *from* everything that is painful or unpleasant in this life will be disappointed. The fact is there are no guarantees of an easy road simply by following in Jesus’ footsteps – just the opposite: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12)

“Discipleship demands the abandonment of self-preservation. To follow Jesus, we must get to that point where we understand doing the will of God is the important issue, not what happens to us.” Peter Maiden

The disciple who seeks the praise and approval of men will often be disappointed. Paul reminded the church at Thessalonica about how badly he had been treated at Philippi and how much he and his companions suffered there. Yet God gave them the courage to carry on even though they were surrounded by enemies. Did Paul give up and change his message to win the approval of others and draw big crowds? “On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4 NIV).

Paul, like every other disciple, lived his life confident that one day he would stand before God (2 Timothy 4:1). His confidence was not in himself, or in the great things he had done for God. His confidence was not in what he had suffered or in what he had sacrificed for God. His confidence was in what God had done and in what God had promised He would do. Peter shared Paul’s confidence: he wrote in 2 Peter 3:11-13 that God’s people should be living holy lives. Since everything around us is going to melt away we should be looking forward to that day and hurry it along. Disciples of Jesus do not hold onto everything in this life with both hands, refusing to let go, but are looking forward to God’s promise of new heavens and a new earth afterwards, when all the brokenness and pain of this life will pass away and only goodness, mercy, and life will remain.

If the disciple's heart is good soil, it will be free from obstructions to the work of the Holy Spirit within. They are able to persevere without fear or worry through the trials of this life, knowing that their death will not be the end but a new beginning. This revelation should have a fundamental impact on the daily decisions of the disciple's life. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:19 (NIV) "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." When a disciple lives their life from a pure heart of faith, they make their decisions based upon the eternal goals of advancing the kingdom – even when it means taking risks or losing something of value in this world. They do not live for the temporary pleasures and applause of the kingdoms of this world but live for God in the context of their hope in Christ – not only in this life, but for the life to come.

The life of the disciple is not only a life of commitment; it is also a life of accountability. When the good seed of the gospel of the kingdom penetrates the good soil of a heart set upon pleasing the Lord, the disciple lives knowing that their true and final accountability is to the Lord alone. Peter made it clear in 2 Peter 3:11-13 that accountability to the Lord who is the just Judge at the end of the age is a healthy motivation for holy living. It is no different for today's disciple than it was for Israel, we are all called to live holy lives, "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16) There are numerous verses in the New Testament that reinforce the call in 1 Peter for disciples to be holy (Romans 6:22-23; 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:21-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; 2 Timothy 1:8-11; Hebrews 12:12-15; and 1 Peter 1:15-16 are only a few).

Ephesians 4:21-24 is a strong statement: if disciples have really heard his voice and learned from the Lord the truths concerning himself, then their desire will be to throw off their old evil nature that partnered in their old evil ways and was corrupt, full of lust, and duplicity. Now that we are disciples, our attitudes and thoughts must be constantly changing for the better. Disciples of Jesus must be a new and different people from what they were before Christ: they must be clothed with the new nature of Christ, holy, and pure. **Therefore, discipleship must be understood as not an end itself.** It is only the means to the end. It is not about the disciple or what the disciple does. Discipleship is about this "other life" – the "no longer I, but Christ in me" life. Discipleship is taking up your cross daily and dying to the old self-driven life. Therefore, the call to holiness is a call to remove every obstacle in the life of the disciple that hinders or obstructs the "New Creation." The love for the things of this world will hinder those born in the image and likeness of God from living as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The call to holiness cannot be understated. Holiness is a consistent theme throughout the Scriptures; it is not simply for the Old Testament. The disciple is like the Master; and if the Master's lifestyle is holy, the disciple must also live a

holy life. Since the disciple's life is no longer their own, having become a "slave of God," the benefit reaped from the sowing of the seed of the word of God into the good soil, leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. Disciples will present their bodies as a "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" not out of compulsion or legalism, but out of love and reverence to God so that He might do the life-long work of perfecting His disciples.

God does the work of transformation in the heart of the disciple; the disciple for their part will "put on" the New Creation – the new self – in true righteousness and holiness (that is a righteousness and holiness that is not their own but is of Christ). Apart from a good heart, surrendered to Christ, it is impossible for the disciple to control their own body. All self-efforts to do so will end up either in a slavish religious legalism (note Colossians 2:20-23) on the one side; or to the other extreme, defeat and giving into a false liberty that permits all things (note 1 Peter 2:11-16). Make no mistake, the disciple has been called "with a holy calling", not by works or for our own benefit, but "according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began..."

"The Christian who lives the life of true discipleship will be constantly looking back to the cross, reminded of how much they are alive, and of their death with Christ there. They will be constantly looking to the future, an absolutely certain future, which will be both a great motivation and comfort." Peter Maiden

It is a huge error to believe that the cross of Christ makes holiness secondary or not essential in the life of the believer. Some have fallen away from the faith and discovered too late that there is a terrible consequence for abandoning the quest for holy living, "without which no one will see the Lord." Peter makes it clear that whether it is Israel or the New Testament church, all who are called by God, are called to be holy.

#### CONCLUSION TO THE KEY PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

The Parable of the "Sower and the Soils" is most often interpreted as an evangelistic story. For those who interpret the parable this way, the point of the story is to pay close attention to the conditions and attitudes of the hearts of our hearers. Evangelists are not to be discouraged when anyone does not understand God's word plainly spoken to them, since their heart may have become too hard to receive the good seed sown upon it. Those who respond to the gospel of salvation with a confession of faith are considered the "good soil."

However, a closer examination of this parable in relation to all of Jesus’ teachings on discipleship will reveal a deeper meaning.

As disciples meditate upon the meaning of the Parable of the Sower and the Soils, they should be motivated to remove everything from their lives that will prevent them from being fruitful. The parable means that not everyone who makes a confession of faith in Jesus as their Savior is ready or able to receive Him into their heart as Lord of their life.

Like seed sown on the path, the word of the kingdom concerning the narrow way of discipleship will never reach the worldly Christian, allowing Satan to snatch away the truth before it has chance to be received. The parable warns the disciple not to take for granted having received the “good news” with joy and gladness, since underneath the surface of the heart there may be stony places – strongholds of rebellion or resistance to the fullness of God’s truth. Those stony places attract the heat of God’s judgment or the persecution of the world. If those strongholds are left undisturbed, they will cause the disciple to stumble and will destroy the life God has waiting for them before it has a chance to take root in the heart. This parable also warns disciples to watch out for those fleshly, thorny, entanglements that tend to choke out the Word of the Kingdom before it reaches maturity, and their spiritual life becomes fruitless.

Finally, this parable gives disciples a vision of encouragement and strength to persevere to the end, knowing that the good seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom sown into a good heart, well-prepared by a way of being a disciple will become the habitation of the Holy Spirit, who will produce an abundant spiritual harvest for the Lord, some thirty, some sixty and some one hundred-fold.

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON FIVE

1. Note the progression of the soil on the path, the rocky soil, and the thorny soil. Each of these types of soil represents a different heart condition. How do these conditions affect the disciple?
2. What three things are necessary for producing a good spiritual harvest for the disciple?
3. Why is love essential for being a disciple of Jesus Christ?
4. How does this parable help us to understand that to be holy, a disciple’s heart must be free from obstructions to the work of the Holy Spirit?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-6

### THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP: “COUNTING THE COST”

Lessons Five and Six will cover The Six Terms of Discipleship Jesus said were necessary for all who would be one of His disciples:

- A Supreme Love for Jesus Christ
- A Deliberate Choosing of the Cross
- A Life Spent Following Christ
- A Fervent Love for All Who Belong to Christ
- An Unswerving Continuance in His Word
- Forsaking All To Follow Him

These terms are found in several key passages from the Gospels. When we carefully read Matthew 16:24-25; Luke 9:57-62, 14:25-33; John 8:31, 13:34-35 and 15:8 we discover that these terms of discipleship are not only for a few “fanatical” or dedicated followers of Jesus. Jesus taught these terms of discipleship as if He fully expected everyone who followed Him to accept these terms. When the modern-day disciple carefully examines these passages, they will discover words like, “anyone”, “whoever”, and “no one.” All of these terms are intended to communicate the idea that these terms were not for just a few, but for anyone and everyone who intended to follow Jesus as their Lord. (See HANDOUT “Count the Cost and Follow Christ”). When added together these terms will equal the Seventh and most radical demand for following Jesus Christ: **Dying to Self**.

“The Savior is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him – or their weekends – or their years of retirement. Rather He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives... Nothing less than unconditional surrender could ever be a fitting response to His sacrifice at Calvary. Love so amazing, so divine, could never be satisfied with less than our souls, our lives, our all.” William MacDonald

#### A SUPREME LOVE FOR JESUS CHRIST

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple’” (Luke

14:26). When you compare this verse with the command for husbands to love their wives and wives to love their husbands (Ephesians 5:25-33; Colossians 3:19); the command for the brethren to love one another (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:20) and Jesus' commandment for His disciples to love one another (John 13:34) it might seem to be out of sync with the rest of the New Testament's teachings on loving one another. However when these other verses are used to shed light on Luke 14:26, it gives the Master's words in this verse a greater depth of meaning.

Jesus was a master wordsmith and communicator. No one "with eyes to see or ears to hear" ever walked away from Jesus without understanding what Jesus was saying. His parables were deliberately intended to hide the mysteries of the kingdom from those whose hearts were not ready to receive, but he carefully explained them to His disciples in private. Another literary device Jesus used to communicate to His audience was hyperbole: a deliberate and obvious exaggeration used for effect. So when Jesus said, "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you..." (Matthew 18:8), obviously He was not speaking literally, but was making the point that extreme measures were necessary to eliminate from our lives anything that would cause us to sin. Luke 14:26 is another example of Jesus using hyperbole. Taken in context with other verses of Scripture, clearly Jesus is communicating the idea that in comparison to the master/disciple relationship, all other relationships are a distant second. Following Jesus might lead the disciple to make sacrifices that will seem to those on the outside to be "hateful" of their families. For example, many missionaries have left mother, father, sisters, and brothers to go to some distant mission field. Others have put off marriage or have taken their wives and children into harm's way in some distant land in order to preach and teach the Gospel to the unreached nations.

William MacDonald pointed out in *True Discipleship* that "the most difficult clause in this passage is the expression, 'yea, and his own life also.' **Self-love** is one of the stubbornest hindrances to discipleship. Not until we are willing to lay down our very lives for Him are we in the place where He wants us." Those who do not understand the terms of discipleship and the love that motivates the disciple to accept them and follow Jesus as their Savior AND Lord will never understand these kinds of sacrifices.

Anyone who studies these terms will discover that each of these terms of discipleship requires two things:

1. **A heart totally committed to following Jesus** by a Supreme Love that transcends every other human relationship
2. **A life totally submitted to the Lord's authority** by following Jesus in word and deed

A disciple's commitment and submission are motivated by looking back on the cross and realizing the price Jesus paid in love so that they might be totally

accepted by God. Our acceptance is not on the basis of performance, but through our position as God's most beloved son or daughter. For the disciple, the cross of Christ is intended to do more than free them from sin and death; it is intended to free them to enter into a whole new life in Christ.

#### A DELIBERATE CHOOSING OF THE CROSS

*"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).*

It seems quite natural to attach the idea of "suffering for Jesus" in this world with the idea of "taking up your cross." It is true that there are numerous afflictions that come as a result of living in this sin-stained and Fallen world. It causes some people to reflect and say things similar to what Jocelyn Soriano wrote in her internet blog: "The greater one's cross is, the greater is the opportunity and the gift attached to it, if only we could take our eyes off our suffering for a moment, and see the blessings being poured upon us in the process." However, relating this kind of "cross-bearing" with Jesus' demand for His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him misses the point. Matthew 10:37-39; Galatians 2:20; 6:14; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7 help us to realize that disciples do not suffer just for the sake of suffering, but there is there a larger goal in the mind of God concerning our cross-bearing.

*"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." Hebrews 12:1-3*

Far from being the means to a perpetual self-martyrdom, for the disciple the cross of Christ is the **great reward of the kingdom**. For it is only after the true disciple of Jesus Christ risks it all and gives their very life to follow Christ that they discover the true joy and peace that is found by sharing in His suffering. It is only after the disciple lays everything they have – including their very life – upon the cross that the imperishable and eternally great treasure of **"Christ in you"** is

found and once it is found, the disciple would be a fool to settle for anything less than to be crucified with Christ:

“When we consider the promises of Christ, risking everything we are and everything we have for his sake is no longer a matter of sacrifice. It’s just common sense. Following Christ is not sacrificial as much as it is smart.” David Platt, *Radical*, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO, © 2010, p.181.

Shortly before he was martyred while attempting to evangelize a tribal people in the jungles of Ecuador, the missionary, Jim Elliot summed up what cross-bearing in the kingdom is about when he wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” So, taking up one’s cross and following Jesus is not about “losing” or suffering for the sake of suffering, but is about dying to that which cannot be saved and taking up that which cannot be lost.

“Radical obedience to Christ is not easy; it is dangerous. It is not smooth sailing aboard a luxury liner; it is sacrificial duty aboard a troop carrier. It’s not comfort, not health, not wealth, and not prosperity in this world. Radical obedience to Christ risks losing all these things. But in the end, such risk finds its reward in Christ. And he is more than enough for us.” David Platt

#### A LIFE SPENT FOLLOWING CHRIST

“Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, ‘Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ Then He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.’ And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” Luke 9:57-62

Matthew 16:25 is more than a call to take up the cross; it is also a call to **follow**. Luke 9:57-62 describes a quick succession of brief encounters Jesus had with those wanting to follow Him. In one case Jesus does the asking, but in the other two, those who meet Jesus along the way do the asking. Although each of these men had different excuses, the reason they could not follow was the same. In

each case, the potential disciple wanted to **set the terms of discipleship**; they wanted to tell Jesus under what conditions they would follow. Jesus’ responses meant that there is no place for disciples who place self-interest ahead of the kingdom. What does Jesus want from His disciples? **Total Dedication to a life spent following Him...** not a half-hearted commitment that keeps one eye on its own while attempting to keep one eye on Jesus.

“To understand what this means, one need simply ask himself, ‘What characterized the life of the Lord Jesus?’ It was a life of obedience to the will of God. It was a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a life of unselfish service for others. It was a life of patience and longsuffering in the face of the gravest wrongs. It was a life of zeal, of expenditure, of self-control, of meekness, of kindness, of faithfulness and of devotion (Galatians 5:22, 23). In order to be His disciples, we must walk as He walked. We must exhibit the fruit of Christ-likeness (John 15:8).” William MacDonald, *True Discipleship*, Walterrick Publishers, Kansas City, KS, © 1975, pp.7-8

#### A FERVENT LOVE FOR ALL WHO BELONG TO CHRIST

Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Considering the number of times this command is given (John 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; and 2 John 1:5), it must be very important for disciples to love one another.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” John 17:20-23

On the night before He was taken away and crucified, Jesus asked His Father a special request on behalf of His disciples (John 17). As part of that prayer (20-23), Jesus made it clear that He was praying not only for those with Him, but also for the future believers who will come to Him because of the testimony of

those disciples who were with Him. “I do not pray for these alone,” Jesus said, “but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” Here is found another reason why it is so important for Jesus’ disciples to be perfected in love for one another: **so that the world will know and believe that Jesus was sent from His Father in heaven.**

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Ephesians 1:22-23

Christ alone is the head of His body, the church, by virtue of His entering into communion corporeally with the new nature (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19). Christ, the One who is the Head of all things and by virtue of being “the first-born from the dead” is the Head of the Church – “the first-fruits” of the new creation among men. A disciple receives into the good soil of their heart, the truth concerning the unity between Christ and His Body, the church; included in that truth is Christ’s Lordship over the Body as its Head. Therefore, by virtue of Christ as the Head, the Church is called to unity in love as “one body” made up of many members. “After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body” (Ephesians 5:29-30 NIV).

This **Fervent Love for All Who Belong to Christ** is a particular characteristic of the lifestyle of the disciple that John said is the sum and fulfillment of all righteousness (1 John 3:10-11). It is the quiet demonstration of **love for one another in Christ** that is the true sign that distinguishes God’s children from the devil’s own. Public occupations of seemingly good social works for those that are on the outside have their reward and should not be neglected. But even non-believers can be full of good social works and public service that have their own reward. It is the sacrificial love of Christ in us that causes someone to lay down their own self-interest in favor of another member of the Body that is the true hallmark of the disciple. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” 1 John 3:16.

#### AN UNSWERVING CONTINUANCE IN HIS WORD

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed’” John 8:31

The King James Version uses the phrase “continue in my word.” Another version says, “If you hold to my teaching...” Anyway it is worded, it means essentially the same thing: the proof of kingdom discipleship is to endure, remain, stay, or be steadfast **in the word of God.**

Review Matthew 13:18-23 where Jesus explains the meaning of the parable of the “Sower and the Soils” and think about the progression of the parable. Note how those who do not receive the word into their hearts and remain in the word (with that seed of the word “abiding” in the good soil of the heart) never reach maturity and bear fruit. The phrase “abide in My word” means to “live” or “dwell” in the Word of God. For discipleship to be real it must **endure over the long term.** In order for Jesus to “make you” or “transform you” into something new, it takes **time.**

Disciples are not born; they are made. And the process by which they are made takes perseverance through many trials and hardships. The strongholds of the old life must be exposed and removed. Those things that choke off the life within must be cleared away, and the thorns removed from good soil so that the disciple can grow to maturity and bear genuine fruit for the kingdom.

#### A FORSAKING OF ALL TO FOLLOW HIM

“It is easy enough to start well, to burst forth in a blaze of glory. But the test of reality is endurance to the end. Any man who looks back after putting his hand to the plow is not fit for the kingdom of God.”  
William MacDonald

Luke 14:33 says it as clearly as possible: “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” Forsake – to give up, to abandon or renounce – is a strong word; it is an **uncompromising word** that leaves no room for negotiation, especially when coupled with the word “all.” However, most Christians – if they are honest with themselves – will have to admit that they are holding onto something. Anyone in their right mind is willing to forsake those bad things that are toxic and destructive to their health and well-being. But when it comes to giving up the good things of life – the pleasures and comforts that make



living on this earth so much more tolerable – that is where they struggle. Almost every believer is willing to give up some of their earnings... maybe even 10%... “But all?” they ask. “Certainly the Lord did not mean everything I have is to be surrendered to Him?” Even after the few are able to settle the issue and release all their worldly possessions to the Lordship of Christ, that

is not all. How about your family? ...Your children? All means all; and there is no escaping it. No loopholes from the Lord to thread your lawyerly needle like the camel through its eye.

“He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God” – then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.” Matthew 15:3-6

*Corban (or kōrban) is translated "a gift," or "a sacrificial offering" (literally, "that which is brought near") specifically, to the altar.* In the course of time it became an abused and objectionable practice. Anything could be dedicated to the temple by declaring it “Corban”, an offering in fulfillment of a vow. The "Corban" immediately belonged to the temple. But it was being given only symbolically; in reality, it remained in the possession of him who made the vow. So a son might be justified in not supporting his old parents simply because he designated a certain portion of his property a gift to the temple as "Corban." Although children were obliged to keep the fifth commandment to honor their parents (whether they loved their parents or not) with the tradition of Corban, they could circumvent that part of the law by dedicating money meant for the parents to the temple. There was no necessity of fulfilling this vow, but it became a convenient excuse to withhold this property for the support of their parents.

Jesus voiced His objection to the tradition of Corban on the basis of its conflict with the spirit and letter of the commandment to “honor your father and mother.” But on another level, it could be used to illustrate the self-deception of a heart unwilling to surrender all to Christ. A modern-day example of this principle might be found in India. British missions dominated India until Independence in 1947. After that time – for a number of reasons – the British missionary societies began to pull out of India, leaving behind many valuable properties that had been used by the church for years. Many of these lands had no clear title, or once the missionaries pulled out, the properties were left in the hands of indigenous leaders. In a number of cases (no one knows for sure exactly how many because these kinds of records are hard to come by) those who were left in control of these properties quietly transferred the titles of the properties into their family’s name. They held onto the properties claiming they were given for God’s use and would not let anyone else use them, but when property values went up, or when they no

longer had need of the property, they sold them off for a tremendous profit and kept the money for themselves... Corban!

Acts 5:1-10 tells another story of self-deception. The story of Ananias’ and Sapphira’s self-deception was driven by a desire to hold onto what they had. They wanted to make it appear that they were giving all to God but lied and held back a portion. It is important to note at this point that the offerings being taken at that time were all voluntary; no one was being forced to sell their property and give to the church. Giving ALL to God does not necessarily mean the physical transferring of personal wealth to the church or to any other person or ministry. Money is a very important barometer to measure a person’s loyalty and devotion to the lordship of Jesus Christ over their life. Jesus’ motivation for making the call to forsake ALL a demand for all who want to follow him will be discovered in the Parable of the Sower and the Soils. The love of money proves to be a powerful stumbling block for those whose hearts are rocky and thorny. By releasing our attachments to material things, we are freed to follow Jesus wherever He leads. Those who refuse to let go, demonstrate a lack of faith in Jesus. Those who surrender all will discover the truth that God is able to return a hundred times over all that is freely given to Him, along with eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

“While Christ Calls us to live in the world, living with eternity in view will mean we are always going to find there will be a measure of isolation and dislocation from those around us. They will find some of our choices and decisions strange, and may even be offended by them.” Peter Maiden

A closer look at the Gospels will reveal that Jesus was not opposed to people having wealth or possessions. Joseph of Arimathea, Lazarus and his sisters are a few of many examples of disciples who had houses, and other material wealth (Matthew 6:25-33; 7:9-10; 27:57; Luke 12:13-34). What Jesus was opposed to was having misplaced priorities that made wealth and the pursuit of it more important than seeking first the kingdom of God. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" Matthew 6:24 (NIV). The lie that the Laodicean church bought into and that many Christians in affluent countries buy into is the lie that it is possible to serve both God *and* mammon. They will end up buying into the deception that equates materialism and consumerism with being blessed by God. Paul understood this principle and wrote, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many

sorrows” 1 Timothy 6:10. (Note how the image of “pierced” in this verse alludes to the thorny soil in Jesus’ parable.)

“By practicing simplicity and pruning the tangled branches of our lives, we will be doing two things at once. First, we will cut back the areas of our lives that have grown wildly out of control and threaten to kill us or drive us crazy. And Second, we will channel our future growth toward a simpler approach to living that will leave us less subject to future headaches and heartaches.” John Michael Talbot

In many ways Saint Francis of Assisi (c.1181-1226) is an example for those who want to bring simplicity into their daily life. Young Francis was raised in wealth and luxury, and spent most of his youth in pursuit of worldly pleasures. After a dramatic encounter with Jesus Christ, Francis turned his life completely around. “The church of the Middle Ages was a big, wealthy, bureaucratically entrenched and politically influential institution whose leaders seemed more like self-centered, power-hungry civil authorities than selfless servants of God and humanity. Even many monasteries, which had been created as refuges for piety, became islands of wealth and worldliness. But Francis was empowered and inflamed with a burning love for God. Simply and profoundly, he took the words of Jesus to his heart, understood what they meant in his mind, and sought out ways he could practice them in his life. He did all of this in a wild and carefree way, not stopping to calculate how it might hurt his career or cramp his lifestyle.” John Michael Talbot, *The Lessons of Saint Francis*, A Plume Book, New York, N.Y., © 1997, pp. 2-3. Francis’ answer for his life was to end up living as a monk and taking a vow of poverty. He founded a group that eventually became the Franciscan Order. But Francis never claimed his chosen way of life was for everyone.

However, Saint Francis continues to inspire and influence many Christians today to seek a simplified life based upon the unadulterated teachings of Jesus concerning wealth and possessions. Francis’ radical, Christlike lifestyle is a challenge for all Christians to carefully examine their lives and ask some very hard questions about their attitudes toward money and the things money can buy. Food, clothing, and shelter are three basic human needs that Jesus promised that God would supply. Jesus taught His disciples to free themselves from attachment to or a sense of ownership of anything of this world so that their hearts will be unburdened and their souls free to follow Him wherever He would lead them. Down through the centuries, countless numbers of Christians have longed to be of service to the kingdom and take the gospel message to the unreached masses but have been stopped from doing so because their lives had become so entangled in

the accumulation of worldly wealth that they felt they could never free themselves and abandon their life to following Jesus to the ends of the earth if He so desired.

Moderation means having only those things that are necessary in our life and not those things that the consumer-oriented marketers tell us we need. A person may need a car for transportation, but they do not need an expensive sports car to impress others. A person may need shelter, but they do not need to live in luxury while others live in poverty. A person needs food to survive, but they do not need to eat out at expensive restaurants all the time or live on fast food. There is something terribly wrong with a so-called “Christian nation” when its citizens spend far more every year on cosmetics, and entertainment than they do on sending missionaries to reach the unreached people around the world.

The way of the disciple is the way of their Master, Jesus Christ. The disciple should walk as Jesus walked and not allow the things of this world to become thorns in their flesh that pull them down and prevent them from becoming fully mature disciples with their branches overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit. The disciple will, no doubt, have to make some painful choices about things that will need to be pruned out of their life, but the reward will be the promised fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23) that the world promises, but can never deliver.

**The disciple’s complete submission to all of these terms of discipleship means submission to authority of Christ as Lord over every aspect of their life.** Their hope for reward is not in this world but is driven by looking beyond the cross to the last day – the day when the “sons of God” will be revealed and all things in heaven and earth will be brought together under the Lordship of Christ for His glory – as was God’s intention from the beginning.

When the disciple takes up their cross, denies their self, and forsakes all to follow, they begin a journey with their Master that requires nothing less than 100% commitment to Him. The disciple’s hope to become everything the Master wants them to be is not in their good works or obedience to these terms but comes by yielding their heart in love to the process of being made – transformed – into the image and likeness of the “New Man” born within by grace through faith in the finished three-day work accomplished by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not an easy way, and many trials and tribulations will come along the way.

Often the disciple will fail to comprehend or will fail to perform, but success comes from persevering. God is a just God and will not judge us in the end by what were the expectations of others, nor by what we strived for in our own strengths and failed to complete, but we shall be judged by what is truly of Him in us:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:4–10

All that is brought into being in us by the Lord himself is designed to complete the transformation of His disciple according to His good pleasure, and to accomplish His ultimate purposes in creation.

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON SIX

1. Review this chapter on the terms of discipleship. Many religions around the world practice some form of asceticism – the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal. Explain “dying to self” in the Christian context and how it differs from religious self-discipline in other faiths.

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-7

### THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP: “A SUPREME LOVE FOR CHRIST AND A FERVENT LOVE FOR ALL WHO BELONG TO CHRIST”

Note: in this chapter I will quote a lot from Bob Mumford’s book *Agape Road: Journey to Intimacy with the Father*, Destiny Image Pub., © 2002, 2006. I highly recommend this book for a further and deeper study on the principles discussed in this Lesson.

#### Love Is The Key

“Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’ Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:28-31

The key to living the Christian life is very simple: the disciple must walk in *agape* by emphasizing love and making it their working force; for love must be central in Christianity. *Agape* is the key because apart from *agape*, which is the unconditional, divine love of God working in and through the life of the believer, nothing is possible for the disciple. (See HANDOUT “What Are the Four Types of Love”). Nothing of what has been said up to this point has any meaning because without love it is impossible to “do” or “be” anything like Christ. Without love:

- **The commitment necessary to follow Jesus is not there**
- **The cost of following Jesus will be too high**
- **Dying to self is impossible**
- **Obtaining money, possessions, and power will have priority over seeking the kingdom of God**
- **The commandment to love each other and remain united in Him will not be possible.**

However, what is seen too often in the church today is **Christians tend to divide from other Christians**, often over quite inconsequential issues. Churches

split and divide often over personal differences or over minor doctrinal differences. These divisions in churches often spread and grow into denominational divides until whole denominations refuse to have anything at all to do with other denominations of Christians. Individuals within families and churches live separate lives from others; they are strangers, meeting at the same communion table, but have no relationship with each other even when they have been members of the same church for years

“Jesus’ job description was to bring us to the Father, restoring our relationship of love and intimacy that went astray because of the fall. God, the Father, was seeking us through the person of His Son. Christ intends to bring us to intimacy by way of the Agape Road. The route, as well as the goal is ‘not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.’”  
Bob Mumford

These fractures in the Body, personal and collective, have for the most part remained unresolved for long periods of time, even though Jesus clearly taught that our unity with one another is central to our truly being His disciples:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:20-23 (NIV)

The Early Church struggled to maintain unity in the body no less than we do today. Paul addressed the issue of unity in **Romans 15:1-7**. This passage of Scripture reveals the four pillars upon which Christian unity must stand and that enable disciples to draw together in unity:

1. **Put God and His Word First** (vs 4 and 6b)
2. **Put Others Ahead of Ourselves** (vs 1-3)
3. **Be like-minded** (vs 5-6a)
4. **Accept One Another As Christ Accepted Us** (vs 7)

<sup>1</sup>We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup>Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. <sup>3</sup>For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” <sup>4</sup>

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

<sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Romans 15:1-7 NIV

No matter what country you are from, no matter where you live; no matter what your language, culture, or religion, there are three things that all humans have in common. One, is all human beings want to **be loved**; two, is all human beings want to **be accepted for who they truly are**; and three, all human beings want to **have value, purpose, and meaning to their life**. The question for the church is: “If those on the outside do not find what they are looking for expressed in us, then where in the world are they going to find it?” Love is the key that makes it possible to achieve the unity Paul prescribed in Romans 15:1-7. Without love, unity will be superficial at best, and attending Christian “fellowship” events will be burdensome. Genuine unity means loving, accepting, and valuing one another in Christ; or in one word, Agape.

In verses 4 and 6b of Romans 15, Paul identified the first pillar upon which true unity must stand: **put God and His word first**. The word of God was given to the church to teach patience and to encourage disciples so that they will share a common vision and an expectation for the fulfillment of God’s ultimate plan. The Scriptures are the very thoughts of God revealed to mankind. When disciples make the Scriptures preeminent – and not creeds, codes, or denominational proclamations – they will become likeminded, and unity will be possible. A disciple with the mind of Christ will discover in the Scriptures the motive that prompted the Master’s self-sacrifice; the spirit in which He endured suffering; and the ultimate purpose for which His whole life was lived. Jesus Christ came and furnished for His disciples the perfect and beautiful model of Agape in which they have hope. Wherever Agape is expressed, the church is able to fulfill its purpose to “glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Love that has personal reward and self-satisfaction as its motive has the tendency and capacity to annul the Agape of God. Self-will, that which is self-pleasing, is the negation of love to God. If my love is twisted, everything is twisted. This takes us to the center of all Christian truth, namely that our love for God must be accompanied by renunciation of our old self.” Bob Mumford

The 2nd Pillar of Christian unity is found in verses 1-3: **put others ahead of ourselves.** The self-centeredness of the fallen human nature is clearly expressed in Cain’s quip in response to the Lord’s concern for Abel: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The resounding answer in Christ is absolutely, “Yes!” Apart from Agape, people naturally live to please themselves; even when they do something for God or others, there is always a “string” attached, or it is done in such a way that it focuses attention back on them. When we read Matthew 6:1-8, and 6:16-18 it is clear that Jesus was not opposed to “doing acts of righteousness” like giving to the poor, or prayer and fasting. What Jesus opposed was doing those things for your own self glory.

A disciple will never be able to truly bear another’s burden until or unless they are able to bear the cross of Christ. It is always easy to spot the person who does not have the love of Christ abiding in their heart: they will always live to please themselves first and cannot sympathize with or share the sufferings of others. The thorny heart – a heart filled with the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth – will choke the spiritual growth of the disciple making them unfruitful; they will never reach a condition of full maturity when the fruit of the Spirit in Agape comes alive.

The 3rd pillar of Christian unity is to **be like-minded.** “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus... with one heart and mouth...” verses 5-6a. The church today is not unlike the Roman church; it is a diverse community made up of people from different ethnic, racial, social, and cultural backgrounds. Every Sunday the church is also filled with individuals who are at different stages of spiritual growth. And based upon their heart-condition, people may or may not be willing or able to express Agape for others, making it difficult for them to accept one another. The *Life Application Study Bible* note on this passage says, “Accepting means taking people into our homes as well as into our hearts, sharing meals and activities, and avoiding racial and economic discrimination. We must go out of our way to avoid favoritism. Consciously spend time greeting those you don’t normally talk to, minimize differences, and seek common ground for fellowship. In this way you are accepting others as Christ has accepted you, and God is given glory.” The good soil of hearts of disciples in community with one another receives the identical word of the kingdom concerning Agape; and being like-minded are able to express genuine Christian unity in the Spirit.

“Eros is the mother of all sins. It can be recognized because it is always self-referential. It is not only self-centered, but it becomes self-consuming, turning increasingly inward upon itself in a tighter and tighter spiral.” Bob Mumford

The 4th pillar is to **accept one another as Christ also accepted us** (verse 7). Agape turns every “good work” away from being self-referential (Eros love) to being Christ-referential, “...in order to bring praise to God.” Leaders cannot decree unity in the body; they cannot force any member of the body to accept any other member. But without acceptance there can be no unity. The word of God gives disciples two important guidelines to follow concerning accepting one another:

FIRST: Romans 14:1 (NIV) says, “**Accept him whose faith is weak,** without passing judgment on disputable matters...” Romans 14:4 (NIV) adds: “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” Romans 14:12-13 (NIV) continues the same thought: “So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.”

Agape teaches all disciples to celebrate their differences; it tells them that not everyone is going to express their faith in the same ways. This does not mean that everyone in the body can live and do as they please, but disciples must use spiritual discernment that is informed by the word of God to sort out what are and what are not “disputable matters.” Certainly, the Atonement of Christ is not disputable, but whether believers use contemporary arrangements or traditional hymns to express their belief in the Atonement is.

“The Greek symbol for Eros is actually a serpent consuming its own tail. It is a highly refined form of self-interest and self-seeking. It is a love that has become so distorted that its only purpose is to meet its own needs.” Bob Mumford



SECOND: Accepting one another requires the disciple to evaluate their attitude toward other Christians concerning **prejudice and favoritism.** James addressed this in his epistle: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism.” James 2:1 (NIV) And, “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.” James 2:8 (NIV)

Agape love enables disciples to see the worth and value of every human being. Agape will allow them to see one another as servants and fellow disciples of Jesus. We are all works in progress and therefore, must not judge one another. Jesus loved us when we were “dead in our trespasses and sins.” He takes us as we

are, but then says “follow me...” once we commit ourselves to Him as His disciple, He works in and through each one of us by His Spirit to make us more and more like Him. *Agape* is love that causes us to see others more sympathetically and to seek the good that is in them; it enables disciples to have a more sympathetic approach to people who are lost and without Christ. Without *agape*, Christians will tend to cut people off, reject, or abandon them when they do not perform or act the way they want or expect them to. Apart from *agape*, Christianity becomes a legalistic religion defined by religious “dos and don’ts.” Or it will veer off to the other extreme and will become an artificial “community” where everyone is made to look good, feel good, and free to live as they please without feeling any consequences for their actions.

“Eros is illustrated by a bent arrow or hook because it is always self-referential, turning back on itself. Eros is the cause and result of the original fall, causing us to run, hide, and shift blame. When sin entered the world, the effect was that the very nature and center of our being became self-serving and was changed from God to ourselves. Eros can be overtly worldly or very religious. The hook can be blatant or very subtle.” Bob Mumford

In this sin-stained and fallen world, people will always disappoint us. Christians who set a very high performance bar for others to meet or else be thrown away as unworthy are not acting in love. Remember: Only Jesus Christ can set the bar for His disciples. In time, He will lead to the place He wants them to be, each one of His disciples who perseveres over a lifetime of following Him. Because He is motivated by pure *Agape*, Jesus loves and respects each and every one of His disciples and will not violate their freedom to choose not to follow Him – even though the consequences may mean heartache, pain, and suffering for them in the end.

The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 wonderfully illustrates the Father’s *agape*. That the actions of the young son were without love is pretty obvious from the start. Asking for his inheritance to be given immediately was not only selfish but showed how little he cared about his father. The appropriate time for an inheritance to be given is after the father dies, not before. The young son was saying by his actions that his father was as good as dead to him. We all know what happens to the young son and what forces him to return to his father – not expecting to love or be loved, but only to be shown some mercy and be given a place to sleep and food to eat in exchange for his labor. The young son is surprised and overwhelmed by his father’s love and acceptance.

The elder son was no better; and in some ways it could be argued that he was worse. The young son was lost out in the world without knowing or understanding his father’s love, but the elder son was lost under his own father’s roof. All the time, the elder son could have experienced his father’s unconditional love for him, but instead he spent his waking hours trying to earn that which never could be bought because it had already been freely given. The elder son was angry, jealous, and resentful of his brother because he could not understand why his father would forgive and receive back home his prodigal son when it was so obvious that he did not deserve it. The elder son, day after day, in his father’s house refused his father’s love freely given. The elder son wanted only to earn and therefore feel worthy of his father’s love, which is totally contrary to the way *agape* works.

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone 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.’” John 14:23,24

Because *agape* should be the motive for everything Christians say and do, the *ethic* of Christianity must also be love. Love must define and shape the system of moral standards or principles for the church. John 14:15, 21-24; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:21-24; and 5:1-3 clearly define what the relationship between love and obedience in the life of the disciple is. All of these verses can best be summed up in Jesus’ words in John 14:15, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Jesus drew the connection between love and obedience: “The one who obeys me is the one who loves me; and because he loves me, my Father will love him; and I will too, and I will reveal myself to him.” (John 14:21 TLB) Peter picked up on the same theme: we purify our souls as we obey the truth “through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren.” John reflects upon the teachings of Jesus in his first letter. It is not enough to simply say “I know Him.” The disciple must keep His commandments in order that the love of God is perfected in him. Walking in love is how we obey His commandments. If we say we believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, then He abides in us. John continues, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.”

The Central theme of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is the Mosaic Law. Jesus clearly stated that He had not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it; then He went on to define what it means to fulfill (live out) the spirit of the Law. In every case, Jesus pointed out that what was most important to God was not the outward show of obedience to the commandments; but what the Father was concerned about – and what Jesus was looking for in His disciples – was a pure love of God

in the heart that produced obedience to the spirit and letter of the law. *Agape* is the true, good fruit that Jesus looks for in the life of a disciple; it is the fruit of a life surrendered fully and completely into the hands of His Father.

Because God is love and love comes from God, the ethical standard of *agape* must be considered over and above any other system of moral standards or principles in the world. Ethics based upon human understandings of what is and is not moral, principled, decent, or just for society are constantly changing, and usually for the worse. Without *agape*, morals based upon God’s unchanging standards are impossible to maintain. However, Christians must remember that it is not obedience to a set of moral principles that makes them a holy people, or that makes a nation a “Christian Nation.” The ethical standards of a people should be guided by disciples whose hearts are being transformed by love through the presence of the Holy Spirit. When *agape* is not present in the church as a whole, any nation will “jump the rails” of godly principles that define all human relationships with:

- God
- Family and marriage
- Others in the church (brothers and sisters)
- Those outside of the church

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” Colossians 1:21-23

It is the presence of Christ in the inward life of the believer that makes them holy in their behavior, not the other way around. Christian ethics are not designed to “make one righteous” but are intended guide the behavior of those who have already been made righteous by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. *Agape* is the natural expression of a heart filled with thanksgiving for what God did on their behalf (Romans 5:19; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 10:10; and 13:11-12).

“Jesus, as Agape Incarnate, seeks to straighten our hook, turning our Eros into internal holiness. He reaches for the driving and motivating factors that are resident deep within our person. This is what He was conveying in the misunderstood text of Matthew 5:27-30... With this as the standard, much of the church lives in adultery and does not

even realize it. The sensuality and self-referential conduct within the larger Body of Christ is a Scandal that discredits the Kingdom of God. Nothing can release us from Eros and precipitate our willingness to embrace self-denial apart from the Cross. No one can free us from that which we still love.” Bob Mumford

If we do not understand this dynamic of our faith, we will never understand what our life in Christ all is about. When Jesus answered the question, “What is the greatest commandment?” He said, first to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength... *Agape* is the fulfillment of the Law, and it is what perfects the life of the disciple. God searches the inward motivations of the hearts of His disciples. From all outward appearances, we might be doing all the right “dos” and avoiding all the right “don’ts” but if there is no love within, then it is all for nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). When God chose David to be king, He warned the prophet not to look on the outward appearance, but to see as God sees into the heart: “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) So to be a disciple in God’s kingdom requires a heart that contains the Christlike character of holiness and models the Christlike character of Love.

Unless the Holy Spirit plants *agape* within the heart of the believer, it just is not there. There is nothing a person can do to generate *agape* within: it is God’s work alone. Human beings, no matter how sincere they might be, will fail to exhibit true, unselfish love apart from the Spirit of the Living God within.

“The word Agape has to do with the nature of God. First John 4:8 says, ‘God is [Agape].’ God is not only the origin of the command to love; He is also the source to release that love. He does not give love as a gift; He gives Himself because He is the source of Agape. The Son is the begotten Agape Incarnate. The Holy Spirit is the manifestation of Agape proceeding from the Father and the Son.” Bob Mumford

The Christian ethic of righteousness depends upon a purity of life that is only possible when the heart is transformed by the inward presence of Holy Spirit. God is love and where the Spirit is there is *agape*. A disciple is one who is truly Born Again by grace and faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, a disciple must have *agape* in their inner being that is born within them along with the Spirit of God. A disciple cannot “produce” *agape* by good works, prayers, fasting, or Christian service. *Agape* is the fruit that comes from abiding in Christ: “Abide in Me, and I

in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). The ordinary process of nature teaches us that the branch produces the fruit; the fruit does not produce the branch. Therefore, *agape*, which is the fruit of the Spirit (and is manifested as love, joy, peace, goodness, mercy, forgiveness, etc.), comes as the life of the Vine flows into the “abiding” branch. Therefore, if anyone abides in Christ, the expectation is they will bear much fruit (John 15:6-7; and Luke 13:6-9).

“One of the religious delusions that I carried for many years was the idea that I could be a better Christian if I would just pray, fast, and study the Word more, it would happen. If I just tried harder, I could be more spiritual, physically whole, and materially successful. However, after years of trying this, my delusion was broken. Jesus said, ‘Apart from Me, you can do nothing’ (John 15:5b). I realized that if God in His love did not carry me through, all of my prayer, fasting, study, and works would not only yield nothing, but I would become increasingly frustrated and despondent, which, of course, would lead to anger. What I needed was not just a personal revival, but a reformation based on an undiluted love for God.” Bob Mumford

The very word “Christian” means “a follower of Christ,” and a follower of Christ is a disciple. A disciple is one who is like their Master. Therefore, disciples must set an example in their own behavior that matches the standard of their Master, Jesus Christ. That is an impossible task apart from the Spirit of Christ within. Attempting to be holy or spiritual by the human effort of self-will always leads to failure. In the end the disciple will either become a miserable, spiritually lifeless, self-righteous snob, or a hypocrite with an outward show of piety but unchanged from within. However, a disciple whose life is set apart for the Lord, and whose actions are motivated by *Agape* will discover a life of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. They will discover a life within that is not their own – a life that enters into God’s rest of genuine forgiveness and is able to forgive others. These Christians will have a powerful impact on the world around them because God has promised to show His perfect holiness, and unconditional love to others through His disciples.

“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to

their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, “Rabbi, Rabbi.”” Matthew 23:1-7

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus’ conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees are highlighted by his visit to a particular Pharisee’s house (7:36-50). A woman “of the city” described only as a sinner gains entrance to the house filled with visitors because of Jesus’ presence there. She falls at his feet and weeping, she began to “wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil...” Recognizing this woman the Pharisee who invited Jesus was shocked and wondered if Jesus knew what kind of woman was touching Him. Jesus, knowing his heart tells him the story of two debtors forgiven – one was forgiven a small amount, the other an enormous sum. He asked the Pharisee which one would love more, the one who forgave them. The obvious answer for the Pharisee was the one who was forgiven the large debt. Jesus reminded the Pharisee of how he received Him into his home with little honor, and says, “Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

A similar theme is found in Luke 18:9-14. In this exchange, Jesus tells the parable of two men that went up to the temple to pray, on a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed a self-righteous prayer, while the tax collector could only pray, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” Jesus said it was the tax collector that “went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” This is the reason why the Lord will not allow His disciples to put on an outward show of righteousness without an inward fortification of purity and holiness in love before God. Apart from *Agape* our devotion to God becomes twisted and turns self-referential. Our religion becomes all about ourselves. “Religion” in and of itself is not the problem (note Colossians 2:23 and James 1:27); the problem is a relationship with God that is based in *eros* (self-referential love) as opposed to an unadulterated relationship of *agape* where everything becomes about Him – it is all for His glory.

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?” 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)

When we examine verses like 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 (“For as the body is one and has many members...”); 2 Corinthians 13:5 (“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith...”); 1 Thessalonians 2:4-7 (“...we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts...”); Hebrews 3:7-14 (“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...”); James 1:2-3 (“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”); and 1 Peter 1:6-7 (...that the genuineness of your faith...though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...) we can see why it so important for the disciple to remove anything from their heart that will keep them from reaching their full potential in Christ. The Lord constantly tests our hearts so **we can see our strengths and weaknesses**. God will give us more grace and power to overcome our weaknesses if we will keep pressing on in obedience towards the goal of **total transformation** in Christ Jesus.

“Temptation reveals whether we love ourselves and our own way more than God and His kingdom. To stop cyclical behavior and begin moving in a more linear direction, we must set our affection on God as our Father. Jesus proves that our love for God can protect us from all temptations, revealing that it is unnecessary for us to project, travel in circles, turn to the right or to the left, or repeatedly demonstrate pride and rage. God’s love shields us and allows us to successfully defeat temptations so that we can find rest and abide on the Agape Road.” Bob Mumford

Sooner or later the Lord will put every disciple to the test – a test that will reveal their **true nature and character**. It is not a permanent “pass or fail” test (the first few chapters in book of Romans clearly reminds us that all have fallen short and failed to meet the demands of God’s perfect Law).

The “testing” that comes from God is intended to reveal the **presence and quality of the life within** – *agape*. 1 Peter 1:6-9 tells us that we can rejoice even in our trials because we know that “the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes... may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love.” Although we do not see Christ with our physical eyes, we believe. And by faith we can “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.” Agape allows the disciple to rejoice even during trials, which is something that is incomprehensible to the natural mind and impossible to do in our own strength. In Revelation, Jesus commends the church of Philadelphia “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of

trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” (Revelation 3:10). When the pressure came upon the church at Philadelphia to bend to the pressure, compromise the Word of God, and deny Christ they stood the test.

The high cost that Jesus places upon all those who want to follow Him seems overwhelming – even legalistic to those who do not understand and whose heart is not prepared to obey and surrender all to Jesus. True discipleship depends upon a purity of love that is only possible when the heart of a disciple is radically transformed by Agape in the inward presence of Holy Spirit. George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization saw this and said, “I believe that Christianity is a ‘revolution of love’, a revolution that the Holy Spirit wants to bring about in our hearts and lives as he radically changes the way that we think and act. I am convinced that there is nothing more important in all the world than this.”

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON SEVEN

1. Why is *agape* essential to being a disciple?
2. What is the difference between *agape* and *eros* love?
3. Describe the four pillars of Christian unity found in Romans 15:1-7 and why are they so important?
4. What are the two important guidelines for disciples to follow concerning accepting one another?
5. In what ways are the ethical standard of *agape* superior to any other system of moral standards or principles in the world?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-8

### THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP “A DELIBERATE CHOOSING OF THE CROSS”

Note: in this chapter I will quote a lot from Bob Mumford’s book *Agape Road: Journey to Intimacy with the Father*, Destiny Image Pub., © 2002, 2006. Also from Peter Maiden’s book *Discipleship*, Pub. Authentic, U.K., © 2007. I highly recommend these books for a further and deeper study on the principles discussed in this Lesson.

The great Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” That is the entire purpose of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Everyone wants the “resurrection power and glory” to be revealed in them. However, most do not want to go through the experience of the cross to have it. But the truth is, the cost of living as a true disciple of Jesus Christ and becoming like Him is to die to yourself. (See HANDOUT “Living to Die”).

#### WHAT WE MUST DIE TO

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it – lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.’” Luke 14:25-33

When the time comes for pastor or evangelist to make his final appeal to everyone in the assembled crowd to become a Christian, how many times has it been said, “With every eye closed, and every head bowed all you have to do is

repeat after me these words and you will be saved”? And just before that final appeal comes, the speaker has promised that Jesus will forgive all their sins, heal all their ailments, solve all their family problems, take care of all their financial needs – Jesus will do everything for them for the asking – and all they have to do is say a little prayer to be guaranteed an eternity in heaven with Jesus.

“So are there different levels of Christian commitment available to us? When we sign up in response to the Christian challenge, can we join at different levels, depending upon the price we are willing to pay? However much that may appear to be the case, it is absolutely not the case. I firmly believe that we often get discipleship wrong from the beginning. To put it bluntly, we attempt to disciple those who are not Christians. They may have a respect for Jesus and some attachment to the Christian religion, but to use the language of Jesus, they have not been born of the Spirit.” Peter Maiden

When we compare the methods of modern evangelists with Jesus’ statements to the crowds that followed Him, it is no wonder that on more than one occasion the crowds turned on Jesus or abandoned Him and went looking for an easier way. The modern method of evangelists is certainly understandable (and is no doubt motivated from a desire to encourage as many as possible to turn to Jesus and receive forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life), but if people come to Jesus without ever being truly discipled or without ever fully understanding what are the terms and conditions for following Jesus, then most will be left on the wayside; will stumble over their strongholds; or will become so entangled in worldly pursuits that their spiritual life will be choked off before they ever reach a level of maturity in Christ that will produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

All of the terms of discipleship discussed in these lessons add up to one thing: dying to self. All are intended to make our salvation in Christ shift dramatically off of ourselves and what Christ can do for us (expressed as *eros* or self-referential love). Christian discipleship is all about denying our own self in order to glorify God. These terms of discipleship are impossible to achieve apart from dying to self, and dying to self is impossible to achieve without the life of Christ within the heart of the believer, expressed as *agape*.

“Should our Lord Jesus now be seen as a new ‘code of rules’? Is He seeking to restore Moses’ law? Or is Agape – Christ’s form of freedom – taking us into intimacy with the Father? Is Christ determined that we grow up, or is He, like so much of institutional

Christianity, committed to the eternal childhood of the believer? Does He want us to play in the little puddle of the Eros payoff or begin to see the Niagara Falls of His Kingdom Agape pouring out on hurting people worldwide?” Bob Mumford

As Christians, we have all heard it so many times before: “die to yourself...die to yourself...die to yourself.” But what does that truly mean in a Christian context? Christians have heard it said so many times before that they think they know what it means, but the evidence from the way most Christians in the modern, Laodicean-type churches live indicates that they have missed the mark by a long shot.

“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’” Mark 8:34-38

When we honestly and directly study the teachings of Jesus, we must come to the inescapable conclusion that the call to discipleship is nothing less than a call to die. In Luke 14:25-33 and Mark 8:34-37 Jesus is clearly warning all who desire to follow Him to count the cost – and that cost is nothing less than everything, including their very life. **A soldier on a battlefield may only die once, but a disciple dies a thousand deaths every day as they put all of their worldly possessions, their family relationships, their hopes, dreams, ambitions, and their life on the cross and follow Him.**

“Discipleship is a word that is often hijacked and haphazardly tossed around to describe a multitude of things. And because it has become such a nebulous term, people launch complaints about a ministry described as ‘discipleship’ that may not have the slightest resemblance to what is possible in delivering transformation to people.” Eric Geiger

The deficiency of most evangelism today is that salvation in Christ is presented as a single event. Once a person accepts Jesus as their Savior, that is all there is to it: end of story. So the rest of their life is spent attending church and learning to be a “good” Christian by giving their time and money to the church while striving to keep from sinning by staying on the “straight and narrow way” (however that is defined by the particular church they attend). However, what Israel’s experiences after entering the Promised Land tell us (and what Jesus’ parable of the “Sower and the Soils” confirms) is that Salvation (believing in Jesus Christ, trusting in Him to forgive our sins, and justify us before the Father by the Atonement in blood of the Son of God) is only the beginning. The salvation experience is leaving Egypt and crossing over the Red Sea; or leaving the Wilderness and crossing over the Jordan into the Promised Land. But entering the Promised Land was not the end of the story. Just before his death, Moses said to the people of Israel:

“The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the LORD has said. And the LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. The LORD will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you” Deuteronomy 31:3-6

Forty years earlier, a different generation stood on the threshold of the Promised Land but refused to go in because their faith in God failed them (Numbers 13:31-33). They saw the inhabitants of Canaan as giants, and themselves as grasshoppers, and concluded, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.”

“We are not discussing alcoholism, sexual misconduct, or other external sins; we are at the root of the problem – ungoverned desire identified as the Seven Giants. It is ungoverned desire that interrupts our abiding relationship and intimacy with God the Father, with our own spouse, our dearest friends, and with people in general. If we do not identify and clearly understand the manner in which these Seven Giants operate, we will be forced to remain in the borderland of conflict, like Moses, who saw the Land but was not allowed the privilege of entering and enjoying it.” Bob Mumford

Much of our Christian teaching and preaching today is leaving people standing on the shores of the Red Sea. The waters of baptism have closed behind them; the Pharaoh’s hordes have been drowned, and that is enough – saved from. Can you imagine the picture: Israel has been delivered from slavery in Egypt, they are safely on the opposite side of the Red Sea, and God says to them, “Okay, I’ve done my job, kept my promise, see you all later. Bye, bye!”? But this is how much of our Christianity is preached today: God has saved us from hell, now just wait by the banks of the Red Sea until death and/or the rapture comes. Sadly, what happens too often is that having once been saved and crossed over the Red Sea to freedom, Christians find themselves going back to Egypt and ending up in bondage to sin because their leaders abandoned them once they made a confession of faith and joined the ranks of the church.

Christian pastors, teachers, and leaders are like the family of the bride that leads the bride to the wedding chapel. The engagement was set and announced. The day, time, and place of the marriage ceremony were set. The invitations were sent out. All the arrangements for the day of the wedding are made – the bride’s maids are ready and the groom’s best man is selected; flower arrangements, decorations, etc. are all in place. The guests are seated. The bride is clothed in her bridal gown, adorned with jewelry, perfumed, and made up especially for the day. The groom arrives at the church and is waiting at the altar. The family escorts the bride to the church; the music plays; they walk up to the threshold at the entrance to the church and stop. “That’s it!” they say. “We have done our job and brought the bride to the church. This is all that is required of us and we can go home now.” That is attitude of much of our Christian leadership today: “just get them to the church.” Say anything... promise them anything... just get them to say “the sinner’s prayer” and get them to the door; the rest is up to them.

But the marriage is not complete and does not take place until the bride is led down the aisle and up to the altar where the groom is waiting. It is not a marriage until the vows are exchanged and the marriage solemnized. It is not a marriage until the bride and the groom join hands and hearts in total commitment to one another and their union is consummated, making them “one flesh.” Then and only then has the family of the bride fulfilled their obligations to the bride and groom.

Because the first generation of Israelites to leave Egypt failed to believe God’s promises of victory, and instead focused on the “giants” who stood between them and abiding in God’s rest in the Land of Promise, they were turned away at the border and never entered in. They were saved from Egypt, but were never saved to the Promised Land; their journey with God became cyclical and they wandered around the Wilderness until the next generation of Israelites was ready to enter in.

“Like Medusa in Greek mythology, it does little good to cut off the head of one of the Seven Giants. The rapidity of their reproduction and their survival rate is like a deadly virus... These Giants cannot be taught how to behave, be domesticated, or disciplined so that they could pretend to do the will of God... they must be brought to death...” Bob Mumford

The giants of Canaan were historical tribes who inhabited the land and stood in the way of Israel as they entered the Land to settle it. But we must not forget that the stories from the Old Testament are not just dry history, but they are used by the Holy Spirit to be examples to every generation of believers (1 Corinthians 10:1-15; and Hebrews 4:1-16). Note how the stories from the Old Testament are used as spiritual examples for New Testament believers; apply to the idea of dealing with spiritual giants in the life of a believer today. Bob Mumford stated it this way in his book *The Agape Road*: “These literal giants, whose job was to keep Israel out of the Promised Land, were the shadow or type of the internal spiritual giants that oppose us from entering the Land of Promises.” p. 102. Mumford identified the seven giants that disciples must deal with today as:

1. **Look Good**
2. **Feel Good**
3. **Be right**
4. **Stay in Control**
5. **Hidden Agenda**
6. **Personal Advantage**
7. **Remain Undisturbed**

In this part of the study, we will examine each of these giants in more detail and see why they must be defeated if we are ever going to enter into God’s rest. As we examine each of these giants we will recognize them as formidable foes, but we can have confidence knowing that the Lord will show us how to defeat them (Romans 8:37-39 and 2 Peter 1:2-11). Allowing the Holy Spirit to expose our innermost self, including the secret motivations of our heart, can be painful, but it does not need to be devastating. As we go through this process, we must remember that the blood of Jesus covers all of our sins and iniquities and frees us so that we can deal with these giants as they are exposed. Keep in mind the fact that the purpose of rooting out and destroying these giants is to remove from the heart of the disciple anything that will obstruct the flow of “living water” (the life of the Spirit of the living God) into the heart of the disciple.

**Disciples are made not born.** Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you...” Both leaders and members (the discipler and those being disciplined) are all being disciplined by the **“Master”** by His **Holy Spirit** within the heart of the believer. Every disciple must intentionally be a part of the “making” by allowing the Holy Spirit to do **the work of transforming** them.

Dying to self is a hard and lonely road (Matthew 7:13). It must be deeply personal – between the disciple and the Master, Jesus, as he works deep within their soul to transform them. Yes, there is a time and place for teaching to share information and common experiences among disciples, but the real work of transformational discipleship will be in those quiet times of **abiding in the presence of the Master**. The human tendency is to make kingdom discipleship another church program, or a “how to” seminar for all believers to follow. But the truth is, no one can do it for you or make it easier for you. If anyone tries to tone down the demands of discipleship to make them more tolerable for a larger audience and make it easier and less threatening, it will only go against the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those disciples whose hearts are longing to go deeper.

Disciples who are willing to go deeper and allow the seed of the Word of the kingdom to penetrate the depths of their hearts must be prepared to meet resistance from some unexpected places as some people close to them may try to talk them out of meeting the highest demands of discipleship, and others may shun them for having “gone off the deep end.” Jesus was no exception: His absolute commitment to His Father went far beyond what His own family members, neighbors, and some of His closest disciples were able to accept.

Make no mistake about it; the way of kingdom discipleship is not an easy way. Jesus never disguised that fact with His disciples. From the beginning Jesus made it clear to them that they should not expect the world to love them for being a disciple of His. In Matthew 16 Jesus revealed to His disciples the suffering he would endure in Jerusalem. Peter took Jesus aside and started to scold Him, saying “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you!” Jesus had to set Peter straight with a firm rebuke: “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:22-23)

Mark records an incident early in Jesus’ ministry when the crowds were starting to flock to Jesus. His own people wanted to stop Him and thought Jesus was out of His mind. Then the religious leaders of the Jews came down from Jerusalem and accused Jesus of using demonic power to cast out demons (Mark 3:20-22). Speaking the truth does not always mean you will be showered with flowers and praises. Luke 4 describes another incident early in Jesus’ ministry. He returned to His hometown shortly after His wilderness experience and being

tempted by the devil. After entering the synagogue, Jesus begins to preach; before He can get to the end of His sermon those who heard Him angrily rose up, drove Him out of the city, and attempted to throw Him over the cliff! (Luke 4:27-30)

“When the Seven Giants exercise their influence in our lives we are tempted to leave the Agape Road. Walking in light rather than in darkness, exposes each of the Giants. Because God is light and ‘in Him is no darkness at all’ (1 John 1:5b), if we are walking in His light, God will expose the Giants within us, not in guilt or condemnation, but lovingly in order to set us free.” Bob Mumford

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:34-36

Satan does not care if the church is populated by weak, fruitless Christians whose hearts are weighed down dissipation or self-indulgence. (Note: the Greek word used for dissipation is *kraipalē*; it means “the giddiness and headache resulting from excessive wine-bibbing, a drunken nausea.”) Taken in the context in which it was spoken, the idea Jesus was conveying to His disciples is to be alert and faithful by not letting their minds and spirits be dulled by careless or self-indulgent living – to not let your heart be dulled by foolishly pursuing a life of excessive luxury or mindless entertainment. A disciple must not let the cares of this life weigh them down. At God’s command, no matter the personal cost, disciples must be ready to press onward with the journey until their transformation is complete (Philippians 3:12-14).

#### A NEW DRUMBEAT

“I learned that we will never get to this point of total abandonment to the will of the Father, regardless of what that means, without repentance; that initial and decisive rejection of evil and the domination of the flesh, and the continual dying to self that must follow. In fact, says Jesus, we must lose our lives. As we have seen, our goals, ambitions and motives must die. Living life in our own strength must cease. As we rise from the water in baptism, we are saying to the Lord, ‘My life is finished, the person that used to be is

no more. I have received your resurrection life, the life of your Spirit and from now on I march to your drumbeat, not my own.’

It all sounds so sacrificial and, if death is involved, then there is sacrifice. But we must never forget this totally liberating statement from Jesus; ‘Whoever loses his life for me will find it’ (Mt. 16:25). It is our willingness to die that opens the door to life. Here is the great lie of our enemy that we will have to give up so much. People refuse to come to Christ, saying they could never make such sacrifices. And we lie to them if we minimize what must be given up. But the reality is we are never more alive than when we die to self: for we have been ‘crucified with Christ... I no longer live but Christ lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20). We are never more fully human than when we die. We do not begin to live as our Creator intended us to live until we die.” Peter Maiden, *Discipleship*, Pg. 33-34

#### HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

“At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.” Matthew 11:25

A very wise king once wrote that “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter” (Proverbs 25:2). Another wise saint named Augustine commented on Matthew 7:7 saying, “It is Agape that seeks, that knocks, that finds... and is faithful to what it finds.” Add to those words, Jesus’ method of using parables, and one of the key functions of the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth (John 14:25, 26; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16) and the message comes into focus that not all people are able to see spiritual truth – even when it is right in front of their eyes (John 5:36-40).

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.” Galatians 6:14-15

When Galatians 2:20 and 6:14-15 are added to what we already studied about the terms of discipleship Jesus taught, the very high cost of following Him is plain to see. And yet, the high cost to be paid for following Jesus remains hidden from some, but not hidden from others. The truth about discipleship, although clearly visible, is seen or understood in the end by only a few. The terms of discipleship are not submerged in deep spiritual waters that only a few can see to the bottom of; nor are they raised so far above that only the intellectual giants of our faith can contemplate them. These terms are plain to see, but only for those who come to Jesus with a childlike faith and a heart to obey no matter what the personal cost once the truth is made known to them.

“The call to follow transforms every area of our lives and there is no other call. There are no differing levels of subscription when you join his kingdom. Although Jesus made it very clear that we must fully consider the cost before committing our lives to follow him, the whole idea that we can calmly consider the pros and cons with a take it or leave it attitude is to misunderstand. This is the Lord of Heaven and earth calling us to follow him. We must realize this is going to cost everything but it is going to gain us everything. The one question is; are we ready to follow, giving him everything, making him the Lord of our lives? There is no other question to answer because nothing else is on offer.” Peter Maiden

When calling upon His disciples to consider the cost of following him, Jesus asked, “What king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able?” Defeating the Seven Giants of the self-life are like going to war, but the war is not against “flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12) that will resist our efforts to die to ourselves. **The Seven Giants feed off of the flesh and will only be defeated when we deny them sustenance and starve them out.** Denying the self is the means to dying to self in the same way that denying food for the body is the means to the physical death of the body.

In discipleship, the first main principle of "Dying to Self" is denial (surrender) of **the self-will** in obedience to **the will of God**. The disciple learns obedience from the Master through the word of God and by His Holy Spirit. As the disciple surrenders to the will of God, the process of rooting out the Seven Giants and being transformed (conformed) to the image of Christ in us begins (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18). “Not my will, but Thy will be done...” is the first step on the journey of discipleship that leads to the ultimate purpose for which we have

been called: to become everything that God wants us to be. (Note that in “The Lord’s Prayer” Jesus taught His followers to pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done...”) Those who want to follow Jesus must settle in their heart from the beginning that the disciple’s **lifestyle** is one of **self-denial**, which involves self-sacrifice, and leads in the end to the death of the self.

“There has been a death to sin and now there must be a death to self. Thank God for the promise of his Holy Spirit, for without him we would never have come to Christ and found new life. Without him we could never know victory in this ongoing battle with self.” Peter Maiden

The second main principle of denial of self (surrender) in Christianity is allowing Christ **to work (live) through us**. Andrew Murray wrote in his classic work *Absolute Surrender* that we cannot expect that in our immortal being, in the divine nature that we received by regeneration that God can work His work in us on a continual basis unless we are entirely given up to Him. “God cannot. The Temple of Solomon was absolutely surrendered to God when it was dedicated to Him. And every one of us is a temple of God, in which God will dwell and work mightily on one condition – absolute surrender to Him. God claims it; God is worthy of it; and without it, God cannot work His blessed work in us.” (© 2005 by Bridge-Logos, p 3-4)

The writings of Paul often refer to this essential principle of self-denial. In Romans 6:3-11 Paul expresses this exchanged life principle in relation to our being **“baptized into His death.”** Since we were buried with Him through baptism, we are also raised with Him and united with Him in His resurrection. Our new life frees us from sin so that we might walk with Him in life. For Paul, Galatians 2:20 were not just words or a metaphor, but were the life he lived: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” It takes a life fully surrendered to the Lord to say with all sincerity: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21) A life fully surrendered to Him will seek those things which are above where Christ is. Our life is no longer our own, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:1-3)

In other words, the “old sin nature” dies and the new nature born in the image and likeness of Christ now lives in those who are “born again” (John 3:3, 6). Emptying of the old self, which is conformed to the old nature, allows God live through His disciples in the new nature, as Paul said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for us, to live is Christ, and to die is gain; and we have been crucified

with Christ. So it is no longer the disciple who lives, but Christ lives in them. The real life that Paul and every other disciple of Jesus Christ now have within them comes from God and is pure Agape. Therefore, those who are dead to the old self and are now raised with Christ must die to the things that are of this world and seek those things which are above. This happens as the disciple fully surrenders and sets their mind on Christ – think like their Master thinks – and denies the self by submitting to the will of God in every aspect of their life. “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

“We cannot receive new life from him unless there is death to the old life. The previous way we used to live, the ambitions, the priorities, the motivations by which we lived, must come to an end. It is a whole new life we are entering. I fear that for many today, being a Christian is seen as a pleasant extra experience we add to our already pleasant lives. But Jesus said following him involves cross-bearing.” Peter Maiden

In a broader, universal sense, dying to self involves surrendering to God’s greater will for His creation. Remember, salvation is not about you it is about God and the greater plan God has for all of creation:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.” Romans 8:18-25

## QUESTIONS FOR LESSON EIGHT

1. It has been said that “A soldier on a battlefield may only die once, but a disciple dies a thousand deaths every day...” Explain what that means to you.
2. Name the “Seven Giants” Bob Mumford identified that disciples must deal with today. What may be the result of not confronting these giants?
3. Review the Apostle Paul’s statements in Galatians 2:20 and 6:14-15; and Romans 8:18-25. How do these verses help us define for disciples the essential principle of self-denial?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-9

### THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP “CONFRONTING THE GIANTS OF THE SELF”

Note: in this chapter I will quote a lot from Bob Mumford’s book *Agape Road: Journey to Intimacy with the Father*, Destiny Image Pub., © 2002, 2006. I highly recommend this book for a further and deeper study on the principles discussed in this Lesson.

“Remember, it is not what comes at us, but what comes out of us that is most damaging. When I realized that it was not Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, but the Seven Giants that were effectively ruling my life and actions, I was shocked and bewildered. Like many others, I was calling Him ‘Lord, Lord,’ but due to forces of which I was not even cognizant, I discovered myself captured and effectively controlled by the Seven Giants. It is critical that we understand the characteristics of each of them.” Bob Mumford

In a personal sense salvation (sanctification) involves the surrender one’s personal will to God’s greater will in order for the disciple’s life to be conformed to what God wants to do in the world. One example of this is how disciples participate in the Great Commission by giving (sacrificing) their time, treasure, and talents to advance the kingdom of God until the Lord’s return. This can only be done when disciples deny their personal self-interests and deny their own comforts and wants. In the biblical sense, denial of self is “putting self aside” in favor of divine will. The more the Seven Giants of self are denied, the more the self-will dies until it is finally, completely dead; then the life of Christ within (Agape) is fully manifested in the disciple without the obstruction of the self.

“The Kingdom is invasive and demanding. It requires us to conform our desires to the truth. Are we committed to our own spirituality in a self-willed determination to be godly? Or are we committed to seeing the glory of God revealed in the Church (see Eph. 3:21)? God, as a Father has committed Himself to those whom He has given His glory, His name, and His purpose. He is waiting for the Church to reveal his glory in the earth.” Bob Mumford

Returning to the Great Commission, which is given to all disciples (Matthew 28:19-20), discipleship unmistakably includes the idea of surrendering to a call. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” Jesus said just before saying, “Go...” Therefore, being a disciple of Jesus is a personal surrender in obedience; and obedience to God is denoted as bringing about His will by observing and teaching all things that the Lord has commanded us.

Obedience in love has lasting effects that are associated with the divine blessing of having the very presence of God with us: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The supreme act of surrender which the believer is called to emulate is **the surrender of Christ to the will of the Father**; first by **completely humbling Himself** and coming into the world Incarnate as the Son of Man; and then by His **complete surrender to the Cross** in the ultimate act of sacrificial atonement (Luke 22:42), breaking the curse of sin and death that was the result of the Fall “... but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8)

In his book on discipleship, Peter Maiden reflected this idea when he wrote, **“Discipleship demands the abandonment of self-preservation. To follow Jesus, we must get to that point where we understand doing the will of God is the important issue, not what happens to us.”** (See HANDOUT, “The Solution to Self-Centeredness”).

#### WHAT DISCIPLES MUST DIE TO: THE SEVEN GIANTS

1. **The Desire to Look Good (Preserving the Self-image)**. In Matthew 6:1, Jesus warned His disciples to “Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (NIV). The need or desire to Look Good creates a self-image based upon appearance as opposed to reality; “it is absorbed in the shadow rather than the substance.” Like the illusory world of the magic show, looking good depends not only upon outward appearance, but upon creating a reputation that is not established in truth (Note Simon the magician in Acts chapter 8).

Like so many stage props and magic tricks of the trade, “Look Good” depends upon clothing, language, automobiles, houses, bank accounts, jewelry, etc. to create a certain self-image the person wants to project to the world. The person under the control of this Giant must wear the latest styles and designer clothes; their self-image and sense of worth are determined by external things that the world tells them will make them desirable. When a

person is motivated by the desire to Look Good, they will drive a certain automobile because it projects luxury, wealth, or status; or they will drive an extravagant sports car because they believe it projects a youthful image of sex appeal; they will conform to the latest popular trends (tattoos, hair styles, clothing, and behaviors) that identify them as being on the cutting edge of society.

“Pastors and Christian leaders are not immune to the Look Good Giant. Pride and personal dignity (see 1 Sam. 15:30) become more important than deliverance from that which has captured us. Pride is everything. This Giant is full of ambition, drive, vows, and promises that cause us to posture and position ourselves in order to keep up appearances.” Bob Mumford

The need to Look Good is not just about material things. People will say things or behave in a certain way to make an impression on others. For the male, it is the “James Bond”, “Playboy”, or sports hero they try to emulate. In the boardroom they say certain things or do things to impress their boss. In their social circles, they are very careful to project the right image to make themselves fit in. “Don’t underestimate the nature of this Giant,” Mumford wrote, “it will pay any price and exerts a tremendous amount of effort to preserve its image, especially in contrast to the biblical view of living in reality.”

“Look Good is one of the primary sources of anxiety. It reveals itself as the fear of man and the aberrant search for man’s approval. Look Good is the motivation behind making sure everyone likes us. Scripture says that this is a snare of the soul (see Prov. 29:25). Looking good may also be the reason we are reluctant or lack the capacity to repent – repentance humbles us. It is difficult to preserve our appearance while apologizing to someone. The Look Good Giant is the source of immeasurable amount of spiritual damage.” Bob Mumford

Of course the problem with this Giant, as Simon the Magician soon discovered, is that when the Spirit of truth comes, the inflated self-image is exposed as being a fake. Simon realized all of his tricks were no match for the genuine move of the Spirit. He became desperate and sought the gifts of the Spirit the only way he knew how. But Agape cannot be purchased for anything less than complete surrender and death to the very last ounce of pride in our self-image. “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12)

2. **The Need to Feel Good (Preserving Self-comfort).** Whenever anyone came to Him with a question or issue, Jesus never had a problem with going straight to the heart of the matter. It was no different in the case of this young man described in Luke 18:18-30. A certain “ruler” encountered Jesus and asked Him a question concerning eternal life. Jesus’ answer was interesting in that we would expect Him to respond with something like “believe in Me and you will inherit eternal life,” and lead him in a prayer of confession and salvation, or simply repeat what He said in John 3:16. However, Jesus seemed to be testing this man, saying, “You know the commandments...” The man’s response was “ All these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus did not take issue with the man’s claim. Considering His teachings in the “Sermon on the Mount” and so many of His other teachings concerning the Law, Jesus easily could have shown this young ruler the error of his way.

“The Feel Good Giant wants to control our emotions, mind, and heart. This Giant has kept more people from freedom than we can imagine. Feel Good involves avoiding pain and discomfort at any cost, is committed to personal pleasure or gain, and is given to the senses or is sensual. This Giant is the epitome of what Scripture identifies as sensuality, causes us to seek gratification of the senses in such a manner that it controls us, effectively becoming our governing force. Feel Good operates on the pure pleasure principle. It is the source or first cause of all our compulsive and addictive behavior.” Bob Mumford

Knowing this man’s heart, Jesus made an offer to him to accept one of the demands of discipleship that would test this ruler and expose a truth about his heart that he needed to see. “You still lack one thing” Jesus said, “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When faced with the choice of receiving everything heaven has to offer in exchange for everything this world has to offer, the rich ruler turned away from a life of discipleship. The Feel Good Giant is very deceptive; it convinces you that somehow it is possible to serve God and mammon. The whole idea the “Prosperity Gospel” is that the physical comforts of this life are not the thorns of the parable Jesus taught, but are indeed the rights of and benefits of salvation.

Ignoring the obvious hyperbole of the camel through the needle’s eye, those under the spell of the Feel Good Giant will pursue a lifestyle based upon whatever makes them most happy: entertainment, fun, pleasure, ease, diversion, recreation, etc.; they have no problem spending hundreds or even thousands of dollars on a luxury cruise around the Caribbean, or to attend some sporting event as long as they say their prayers of thanksgiving before every meal, and put a few dollars in the offering at their church on Sundays. Some Christians find justification for this from a single ninth-century commentary asserting that in first-century Jerusalem there was a gate called the Needle's Eye which a camel could only get through on its knees. (Sort of like the scene from the Hollywood movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*: “only the penitent man will pass ...”). It may be a cute allegory, but there's no archaeological or historical evidence for the existence of such a gate.

“Feel Good is enhanced, enabled, and seems centered on sex, drugs, alcohol, shopping, etc. while the real and deeper problem is that feeling good has become the ruling force. Repeatedly, I have watched powerful men and women of God lose their ministry and marriage for a sexual encounter with someone else’s spouse. Someone once said, ‘The chase is long, the expectation great, the pleasure momentary.’ These are descriptions of an immature personality, ruled and directed by the pleasure principle. We all know that sometimes our feelings lie to us. When we are in a situation that makes us uncomfortable, we move toward freedom in the Kingdom of God by opposing the demand of the Giant of Feel Good.” Bob Mumford

At this point in time, someone might be tempted to ask if this means Jesus intends for all of His disciples to live like monks or walk the streets like a naked Sadhu, begging for their daily bread. Upon hearing Jesus’ exchange with this rich ruler, those present were astonished and asked essentially same thing: “Who then can be saved?” Jesus’ answer to that question, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” seems to offer hope that it is possible to hold onto your riches and still enter heaven, but it is in fact hope for those who are under the power of the Feel Good Giant, that with God’s help they will be free.

Just when the matter seems settled, Peter stirs things up with his statement, “See, we have left all and followed You.” Once again, Jesus gives a surprise answer: “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left

house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.” To the rich young ruler, Jesus said, “Go and sell all you have and give to the poor.” But here Jesus says that His disciples will receive many times more NOW as a reward for following Him.

This appears to be the legal loophole or “needle’s eye” that those under the spell of the Giant of Feel Good are looking to crawl through to use as justification for the pursuit of wealth and all the pleasures it brings. However, when this verse is carefully examined, and taken in context of the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-20), it becomes clear that Jesus is speaking of those disciples to have forsaken all and who exercise true stewardship over HIS wealth. The Master is free to pour material possessions into the hands of His stewards because they are free of the Feel Good Giant; He can trust them to invest everything God gives them to advance His kingdom and not their own personal fortunes.

“It would be simpler if Christians were called to vows of poverty. If we knew that it was God’s will that none of us own cars; that all of us were allowed precisely two sets of underwear, one set of outerwear and \$50 a month rent, one pair of slippers and one pair of shoes, we would all know where we stood. But Jesus does not make it that easy. His teaching about giving away a second suit is not an attempt to set maximum living standards.” John white

Peter Maiden wrote, “Our ownership and our use of what God entrusts to us must recognize his Lordship over everything we are and have. It must recognize that we no longer live for ourselves: death has taken place and we live now for him.” The Lord may provide a good salary, a nice house, and good car for a disciple to use, but the disciple’s response must be to prayerfully consider for what purpose God has provided these things. How does God want you to use HIS salary, HIS house, and HIS car to advance HIS kingdom? Only the disciple who is truly free – dead to the self-life and allowing God to live in and through them – will be free of deception and will honestly answer those questions, seeking to obey God’s will.

2. **The Need to Be Right (Preserving Self-righteousness).** The obsession to Be Right is one of the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge. One of the many unintended consequences Adam and Eve discovered after consuming that fruit was being cut off from the abiding source of God’s absolute truth to guide them. Apart from the Holy Spirit, mankind must rely upon the shifting

sands of human knowledge and science. “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith...”<sup>1</sup> Timothy 6:20-21a (KJV).

“Be Right injures our ability to exegete the Scriptures, respond to prophetic direction, or obey some specific instruction from the Lord Jesus. It signifies our commitment to our tradition or system, i.e. Calvinism, Lutheranism, Catholicism, etc., above the overall authority of God’s Kingdom. Conversely, Be Right may be the source of our anger and alienation from the mainstream of Christian doctrine called the ‘tenor of faith.’ There is a particular danger in personal revelation when we think something is ‘of the Lord’ – it has the power to capture us.” Bob Mumford

The Be Right Giant may be the greatest source of all human conflict. Marriages have ended in divorce, families have been torn apart by disputes, churches have split, denominations broken off, and whole nations have plunged into bloody civil war because one or both sides in the conflict did not have the capacity to admit the possibility of error. The great Anglo-Irish satirist, Jonathan Swift (1667 – 1745) included in his classic tale, Gulliver’s Travels, a story of the quarrel over the practice of which of the ends – large or small – eggs should be broken. In his story, Swift wrote that differences between Big-Endians (those who broke their eggs at the larger end) and Little-Endians had given rise to “six rebellions... wherein one Emperor lost his life, and another his crown.” Of course, this was a satire of the political and religious conflicts of his day, but when seen from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven, the disputes that trigger most human conflicts are of little more significance than the “Egg Wars” of the mythical kingdoms (realms) ruled by two childish and self-styled emperors.

“To be right, unchallenged, and face life and the future with an unbowed attitude leads to a form of self-righteousness that turns our light into darkness (see Matt. 6:23). Many of us controlled by the Be Right Giant may have traded God’s grace for the bizarre privilege of maintaining a façade of being right, even in the face of God Himself. God asks Job directly, ‘Are you going to discredit my justice and condemn me so that you can say you are right?’ (Job 40:8 TLB).” Bob Mumford

**Read Luke 12:13-15 and 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. How do these passages relate to denying the Giant of Be Right?**

The Be Right Giant feeds upon the self-referential love of Eros; it demands grace, but refuses to give it. Agape exposes the innermost secrets of the obstinate heart – bent, unyielding, self-righteous, self-justified, and implacable. Once the Be Right motives are exposed by the work of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Agape – in the life of the disciple, they must first acknowledge that behavior, and then repent, asking forgiveness; finally move on past it and not spend time in self-pity or kicking themselves to the ground. Receive forgiveness from the Lord and move on: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” 1 John 1:8-10 (NIV)

4. **Stay in Control (Preserving Self-will).** If ever there was a disciple who was out of control, it was Peter the moment he stepped over the bow of that boat and began walking on the water to Jesus (Matthew 14:25-29). Peter was experiencing what it means to “walk in the Spirit” over which he had no control. As soon as Peter took his focus off of Jesus, he began to sink. When the other disciples in the boat saw that, they may have been thinking, “I’m glad it’s Peter out there and not me!” But remember, in the end Peter did not have to swim back but he walked back to the boat with Jesus at his side. The truth be told, every disciple of Jesus Christ has some “bow” of some kind of “boat” to get over in their life, and it is the same Giant of Stay in Control that has to be defeated in order to get over it and experience the other life of walking in pure Agape.

“Stay in Control believes the humanistic myth, ‘I can be anything I want to be.’ When we get saved, this can reappear under the Bible verse, ‘I can do all things’ (Phil. 4:13). We leave out the ‘through Christ which strengthens me’ phrase. Because of the Stay in Control Giant, we cannot participate in anything with a whole heart that we are not leading. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we are the only ones who know how to correctly do the project.” Bob Mumford

**Read Isaiah 14:13-14. Count the number of times Satan says “I will...” How does the issue of self-rule relate to Stay in Control?**

Self-rule is the heart of the war between Satan and the Lord and since the fall it has also been the issue between fallen man and the Lord. Self-rule or the reign of God; both cannot co-exist in the heart of a disciple. Therefore, there must be a death to one or the other. When Adam and Eve took from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they lost the reign of God in their hearts, and God lost His reign in the heart of Man. Stay in Control is what keeps our hands upon the steering wheel... it is what keeps us in the boat where it is safe and where we have the illusion of control over our life.

“Stay in Control demands to have his hands on the steering wheel – he always wants to be in control. He believes that if he is in control, everyone is safe and the results are guaranteed. Because he thinks he is god, Stay in Control must determine the outcome of everything for everyone. There is always anxiety regarding the future, because it may be just beyond their control, questioning or challenging their self-confidence. Stay in Control simply freaks out when control is relinquished to God.” Bob Mumford

The desire to stay in control is one of the greatest traps that Satan sets for people: they are afraid that if they let go of the self-reign, Jesus will ask something that is more than they are willing to give up. And so people suffer under the anxiety and stress of maintaining control over their finances, their health, their possessions, their family, etc... For many the stress becomes too much for them and they seek a release from the pressure through drugs, alcohol, sex, materialism, or escape into social media or video fantasy lands where they spend hours with a control device in their hands, pretending to be something they are not with power over their well-defined and confined world with established rules and borders.

“Anxiety is a major symptom for anyone who has the fear of losing control. If a person is given to anxiety and lack of rest, chances are this Giant is roaming freely in their life. Anxiety is the sin of our culture...Loss of control with, its accompanying rage, violence, defiance, and self-hate, is the first cause of suicide. Loss of control leads to the heartbreaking discovery that you are not God.” Bob Mumford

Read 1 Corinthians 4:18-19; 1 Timothy 6:17; and 2 Peter 2:10. Proud, boastful, arrogant, puffed up, presumptuous, haughty, self-willed... these are

the words used to describe those who cannot or will not surrender control of their lives to the Lord. It is this condition that led to the deception of the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:15-17; they became arrogant because they believed they were in control and in need of nothing from God.

5. **Having a hidden agenda (Preserving Self-interest).** One of the most important things Jesus must do in the lives of His disciples is to shine the light of truth on their hidden agendas. This is what made the Pharisees so angry with Him. They were great at putting on an outward show of piety, but inwardly they were full of anger, bitterness, self-righteous judgment, and rebellion (Note Matthew chapter 23). Jude 12 exposes this Giant when it describes those godless men who slipped in among the church under false pretenses, “...blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualms – shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead” (NIV).

“Hidden Agenda is covert with words of peace and a heart of criticism. It is like a snowball with a rock in it. It appears to be one thing, but when it unexpectedly hits someone, they are devastated. With this Giant in operation, we lie in ambush with undisclosed motives, watching for weakness and vulnerability, ready to spring the trap, which has been disguised and then set with lies or half-truths. We hide one thing in our hearts while proclaiming another. This Giant is a user; it seeks to use life, people, and every event for the express purpose of advancement of our own interests.” Bob Mumford

On the surface, each of the three men mentioned in Luke 9:57-62 had different issues that prevented them from following, but below the surface – what Jesus was wanting to root out as a precondition for them following – was a hidden agenda that made each of these men want to set their own terms for following Jesus. “Lord I will follow you if...” or “Lord, I will follow you when...” are unacceptable offers for Jesus to accept. Jesus is Lord and Master, therefore HE alone sets the terms of discipleship – not the disciples. (Compare this Hidden Agenda Giant with Matthew 13:20-21). The Lord alone makes the offer of discipleship to those who encounter Him along the way. With the offer comes the cost of following Him, which is nothing less than total submission to His Lordship. Any Hidden Agenda buried in a person’s heart will be quickly exposed once the terms of

kingdom discipleship are presented to them; once exposed, they must quickly remove it or else it becomes a stronghold and stumbling-block to the disciple.

The world around us is a minefield of hidden agendas; they are everywhere – in family relationships, in politics, at the workplace, etc... and, yes, even in the church. Movies and television plots often revolve around the devious motives and hidden agendas of the central characters. Mankind’s fallen nature teaches Adam’s race to hide their true selves from God and from others (Genesis 3:7-8).

In a Christian context, the Hidden Agenda Giant often surfaces in church or ministry leadership meetings when those involved have made up their minds before the meeting begins what the outcome must be. They may quietly sit through the whole meeting creating an impression that they have a desire to reach a mutual and unified decision, but what they are really doing is seeking approval only for what they have already decided (Note Judas in John 12:1-6). Read Deuteronomy 15:7-10; Psalm 26:2-3; Proverbs 2:1-15; and Jeremiah 17:9-10. What do these verses from the Old Testament tell us about the destructive effects of keeping Hidden Agendas buried in our hearts?

“The apostle Paul isolates three hidden agendas in Second Corinthians 4:1-2: ‘Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.’ Hidden Agenda are maneuvered, cultivated, and nourished in secret, clandestine, and often self-deceiving ways. Once engaged, we cannot rest until and unless our hidden agenda has been accomplished.” Bob Mumford

Bob Mumford pointed out that “Some hidden agendas are overt, short-term, and obvious; others are more subtle, complex, elaborate, and may take years to play out.” But either way, hidden agendas are most treacherous when they are cloaked in Bible verses to give them the appearance of divine authority or when disguised as social works to give humanitarian cover to the real agenda of rewarding themselves with more power and money. It takes Agape abiding in the heart of the disciple to detect the truth and destroy this Giant.

6. **Taking personal advantage (Preserving Self-empowerment).** In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, tax collectors were expected to take a commission on the taxes they collected. However, most of these tax gatherers took advantage of the power and position they acquired and overcharged the people, vastly enriching themselves in the process. Tax collectors were despised by the Jews because of their reputation for cheating and their support of Rome from which they obtained their authority to collect taxes.

Judas was given the responsibility to handle the money that was given to support Jesus and His disciples. Having the same heart as the tax collector, he took Personal Advantage of those who gave and helped himself to a “commission” from what was collected. The lesson of Matthew versus Judas tells us that there must be no room in the heart of a disciple for Taking Advantage of others. Once exposed, if it is not immediately dealt with, this stronghold will eventually lead the disciple to betray Jesus as they take advantage of His sheep in His name. Read John 21:15-17. Note Jesus’ commandment to Peter. In the early chapters of Acts, Peter emerges as the leader of the church. Why would Jesus think it was necessary at this point to stress to Peter the need to take care of His sheep?

“Eros appears in biblical clothes when we use crowds, churches, mailing lists, fund-raising, church growth, and even evangelism to work the system to our own advantage. Once Personal Advantage is wrapped in biblical clothing, it is very difficult to challenge and can even be encouraged and assisted. Working the system then takes on the wrappings of success, and no one can argue with success.” Bob Mumford

As its name implies, this Giant thrives by using others for its own purposes. The New International Version of the Bible translates the Greek *eritheia* (strife, or contention) as “selfish ambition” (Phil. 1:17 NIV or Phil. 1:16 NKJV and Phil. 2:3) because the Greek denotes “ambition, self-seeking, rivalry,” with self-will being an underlying idea in the word; it is derived from the root word that means “seeking to win followers (factions).”

“Personal Advantage is the most obviously self-referential of the Seven Giants. It is purely utilitarian in every relationship. People are used for self-promotion or self-advantage. Every opportunity, friendship, or event is evaluated by ‘What’s in it for me?’ This Giant of Personal Advantage has the capacity to transform our call to be a dream-enabler of others – one called of God to help others

reach their destiny – into a dream stealer (see John 10:10). We possess, acquire, and control others in a utilitarian manner so that we can be successful. We are not concerned about their dream, but only about how they can help us bring our vision to pass.” Bob Mumford

Jesus had to deal with this issue in His disciples; whenever the issue came up of who would sit a Jesus’ right hand when He established His kingdom, Jesus would respond by reminding them that whoever would be first in His kingdom would have to be last and the servant of all (Mark 9:35). Another time He set a child before them and said, “...whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4).

John 13:1-17 describes Jesus’ ultimate demonstration of how Agape destroys the Giant of Personal Advantage. It was the night before He was taken away and crucified; He took the position of a lowly house slave and removing His outer garments, washed His disciples’ feet. Jesus concluded the exercise saying, “Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

7. **The desire to Remain Undisturbed (Preserving Self-possession or Composure).** Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-27. Paul’s life would have been much easier if he had refused the invitation to come to Antioch in the first place. When you read his account of the things he suffered on his missionary journeys, it would have been better for him to have stayed in Antioch and enjoyed the fellowship and respect of the saints there. This passage from his letter to Corinth is sometimes called “Paul’s Prosperity Doctrine.” Imagine what it would be like if evangelists preached from this passage of Paul’s letters just before giving the traditional altar call! Review Matthew 13:3-7. What do Christians with these heart conditions share in common?

“What is particularly offensive and needs to be avoided at all costs by this Giant is that any disturbance created by the demands of the Kingdom not become de-centering, troublesome, or course-changing in the possessor’s life. When the Undisturbed Giant sees

drastic or unpredictable change in his life, he sets his face, hardens his will, and determines to deny or avoid all challenges at any cost.” Bob Mumford

At every step along the way of following Jesus, the disciple will discover their world turned upside-down or inside-out. The life of discipleship is a life of transformation, and transformation does not come without disturbance. This is why so many are left by the wayside. A heart resistant to change becomes hard as clay on the surface. When the word of the kingdom is sown into the heart that desires above all else to remain undisturbed it will never penetrate below the surface, and that which is not trampled down and destroyed by the same old patterns of worldly and carnal living will be devoured by the enemy.

“Because of this Giant, we seek to avoid or manipulate anything that could result in inconvenience or discomfort. Undisturbed requires more assurance and confirmation than is reasonably available; consequently, we allow inconvenience to become a barrier to our helping others. The real problem is that we simply can’t be bothered. ‘Don’t ask me to get involved; it’s my day off!’ It is too inconvenient to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, invite the stranger in, clothe the naked, or visit the prisoner (see Matt. 25:35-36). As someone once observed, those with modern home entertainment centers do not rise up and revolt.” Bob Mumford

The stony heart is resistant to change. The rocks and hard places in the heart are best left in the dark where they can remain undisturbed. Once the Spirit of God begins to work in the heart of the disciple, He exposes these strongholds to the light of truth. The disciple must disturb the soil of their heart by removing them; this is often a difficult and painful process. The heart controlled by the desire to Remain Undisturbed will refuse to make any significant changes in attitude or behavior. And like the seed sown among the rocks, their commitment to follow Christ will end because the word of the kingdom could find no root in their heart. And again, the Undisturbed Heart will never reach maturity because kingdom discipleship requires digging up and rooting out those thorns and bushes that will choke the word of the kingdom. If the thorns are not pulled up, weeded out, chopped down, and thrown in the fire they will eventually stop the disciple

from ever reaching full maturity in Christ when the true fruit of the kingdom comes forth.

“After years of being hurt and injured by Christians, I began to seriously seek an undisturbed lifestyle. I said to my wife, ‘I’m going to buy five acres, get a German shepherd, and teach him to bite anyone who carries a Bible.’ This may sound humorous, but it is very revealing! ...when we set ourselves to remain undisturbed, we calcify and soon become undisturbable.” Bob Mumford

Read Matthew 13:14-15; 25:35-36; Luke 10:30-35; and Matthew 11:17. How do these verses reveal the attitudes and actions of those whose hearts are controlled by the desire to Remain Undisturbed? When the Giant of Remain Undisturbed reigns and rules over the heart of a Christian, they will avoid at all costs any and all of the demands of discipleship. To wholeheartedly follow Jesus requires a radical lifestyle that without a doubt will bring drastic – sometimes unpredictable – and always course-changing moves in the life of the disciple. The Master is the one who sets the agenda for His disciples and not the disciples themselves. This of course involves risk; it is often painful and self-sacrificial. Those who never want to leave their easy chair, perfectly positioned to give them the best, unobstructed view of their television set will never see the need to be personally involved with feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, inviting the stranger in, clothing the naked, or visiting the shut-in or prisoner.

“Undisturbed can describe a powerful and potentially useful person wrapped in spiritual sloth, apathy, and self-preservation. We can lose our life because of the refusal to embrace the adventure and take the risk.” Bob Mumford

Throughout human history and in the pages of Scripture, these SEVEN GIANTS OF SELF appear over and over again. They are all around us, and unfortunately, every disciple has to contend with one or more of these Giants reigning in their own heart. Observe the movies, television programs, advertisements, etc. that influence billions of people around the world. Advertisers are trained to use images and words that appeal to the Seven Giants because they know they can easily manipulate behavior and convince the consumer to buy their products. Those who write books, magazine articles, and TV or movie scripts know the kinds of characters and plots that will appeal to the Seven Giants and attract sales.

The spiritual forces in heavenly places that wrestle against Jesus' disciples will constantly throw stumbling-blocks, temptations, and distractions along the way in a desperate attempt to keep the Kingdom Disciple from destroying these Giants and pressing on to their complete transformation in Christ. Bob Mumford closed his chapter on the Seven Giants with a quote from Oswald Chambers that is most appropriate to close this part of our study as well:

“We are never free from this snare until we are brought into the experience of the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire. Obstinacy and self-will will always stab Jesus Christ. It may hurt no one else, but it wounds His Spirit. Whenever we are obstinate and self-willed and set upon our own ambitions [Personal Advantage], we are hurting Jesus. Every time we stand on our rights and insist that this is what we intend to do, we are persecuting Jesus. Whenever we stand on our dignity we systematically vex and grieve his Spirit; and when the knowledge comes home that it is Jesus whom we have been persecuting all the time, it is the most crushing revelation it could be... All I do ought to be founded upon on a perfect oneness with him. Not on a self-willed determination to be godly. This will mean that I can be easily put upon, easily over-reached, easily ignored; but if I submit to it for His sake, I prevent Jesus Christ being persecuted.”

The good news for the disciple is that they do not have to fight alone. God has not only promised us the victory but has supplied the means for us to achieve it: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12 NIV). **But make no mistake about it, dying to self is not an easy way; it makes the highest demands upon those who set out on the journey of Kingdom Discipleship with God.**

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON NINE

1. Read Acts 8:4-24, the story of Simon, the sorcerer. How were his actions being controlled by the desire to Look Good?
2. Read Luke 18:18-30. Compare with Matthew 13:22, the lesson of the thorny soil. How did the need to preserve physical comforts affect this young man's ability to follow Jesus?

3. Read Mark 3:1-6. Consider Jesus' confrontations with the Scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the Law in the Gospels. What was the root issue that caused this conflict? How did they respond whenever Jesus proved them wrong?
4. Read Matthew 14:25-29. On this particular occasion, what separated Peter from the other eleven disciples who stayed in the boat?
5. Read Luke 9:57-62. What were the reasons these men were not able to follow Jesus? What was the one heart-condition these men had in common?
6. Read Luke 5:27-28; 19:5-10; and John 12:1-6. Describe the three very different responses – two positive, one negative – of those who encountered Jesus along the way.
7. Read Acts 11:25-26; and 13:1-3. Consider the events of Paul's three missionary journeys described in Acts. How would Paul's life been different if he had chosen to remain undisturbed in his hometown of Tarsus?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-10

### THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP “A LIFE SPENT FOLLOWING CHRIST”

Although “A Life Spent Following Christ” is for all disciples everywhere, this lesson will concentrate on the specific impact that following Jesus Christ has on missionaries and their lives. Those who answer the call of God to leave their home country and travel to a foreign land to participate in the Great Commission of Matthew 19:29-30 will face many challenges and hardships along the way that will test their resolve to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth. Some of those great challenges are:

- Singles will often have to cope with **loneliness**.
- Women will have to cope with the **drastic differences** in what are acceptable roles for women between Western and non-Western cultures.
- Families have to settle how to **raise and educate children** in the mission field.
- **Marital tensions** that normally exist between spouses may rise to the surface and cause distractions to the ministry.
- Different **personalities, cultures, languages, and lifestyles** between the missionary and those they are ministering to (or alongside) often cause tensions and conflicts that can distract from or even destroy the work the missionary came to do.

In addition to the personal and family hardships most missionaries face, they often have to face **political, societal, and environmental issues** that exist in this sin stained and Fallen world. Missionaries are almost always positive and idealistic individuals who believe “Jesus is the Answer” to all the problems in the world. However, on the mission field, the messengers of the “good news” of salvation must face the reality that they are presenting the Gospel in the midst of systemic poverty, sicknesses and diseases that are often preventable if proper health care existed, environmental neglect, and places where natural disasters are frequent. In many places around the world children are made to work long hours in dangerous conditions; girls and women in particular are often trafficked for labor or as sex workers; governments are often corrupt and unresponsive to the needs of the people and may be hostile to the presence of foreign missionaries coming to their country to help the poorest and least powerful citizens they rule over.

In many Western nations – like the United States – Christians face little or no threats because of their faith. However, once the missionary leaves the safety of home, family, and country, they may discover that most of the world is a dangerous place for Christians. Terrorists, criminals, hostile native tribes, and corrupt governments exist in many parts of the world and the Christian missionary must realize that they may have to live in or travel through places where their life and safety will be threatened. But **persecution and martyrdom** are not new to the church; Christians have been the victims of every kind of persecution human beings can inflict upon others – up to and including torture and death. (See HANDOUT “What is Martyrdom?”) Serving in the midst of danger and hardship on a foreign mission field can take a heavy toll on the mental and physical health of the missionary, which is why younger people are most often recruited for long-term missions.

In addition to the physical hardships there are always spiritual battles to be fought as well. The missionary must never forget the fact that once they step out in faith to seek and save the lost for the sake of Jesus Christ and His kingdom, they will be engaged in warfare against “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places...” as the Apostle Paul said. In his letter to the Ephesians (6:10-20) he encouraged believers to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” and to put on the whole armor of God “...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” However, Christians should not confuse the supernatural aspects of our warfare with those external devices Satan uses to create obstacles, threaten, and discourage Christians from pursuing their primary mission, which is to proclaim the gospel to a lost and hurting world.

In their book, *Spiritual Warfare and Missions*, (B&H Books, First Edition [June 1, 2010]), Jerry Rankin and Ed Stetzer identified four external obstacles to the church and mission of God:

1. **Counterfeit Gospels:** Sadly, it can be argued that more people are on their way to hell believing they are saved than the number of those who heard the true message of salvation from the New Testament but rejected it. From the beginning, Satan’s strategy has been to distort the truth, and to deceive people into believing lies; Jesus called him “the father of all lies” (John 8:44). There are popular movements in the church today that are fed by those who persuade believers to interpret truth and reality by feelings and personal experiences rather than the truth of God’s Word.

The Apostle Paul warned his young disciple that “...the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth and

be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:3–5). Paul and other leaders of the church always had to contend with those in the church who adhered to false religious practices or were being deceived by false teachers who distorted and watered down the gospel to make it more agreeable to the masses.

The missionary must be prepared to present sound doctrines from the Word of God without compromising the truth. They must be ready to defend the gospel they preach using the sound principles of biblical exegesis. There may be some issues that Christians can disagree over without disrupting the peace and unity of all believers (style of worship, day of the week to meet, order of Sunday services, etc.). But on the essential doctrinal issues that affect the salvation of sinners, there must be unity, “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” (Titus 1:7–9).

2. **False Religions:** The second roadblock that Satan uses to obstruct the missionary is to keep the people under the control of false religions or atheistic regimes using governmental regulations that make it illegal to openly preach the gospel or to distribute Bibles and Christian literature. The book of Acts makes clear the fact that the church was born and grew in a world that was hostile to the preaching of the gospel. Starting in Jerusalem, then to the Roman world, and on to the ends of the earth, the leaders of false religions have used every method possible – including expulsion, torture, imprisonment, or death – to keep Christian missionaries from presenting the gospel of salvation to those being held under the power of the state or some other religious system.

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.” (Colossians 2:16–19).

Even in places where preaching the gospel is not officially banned, the leaders of false religions will use fear and superstition to keep people under their control. Jesus Christ came to set men free from religious traditions and useless rituals that cannot save anyone from the power of sin and death. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:21–24). Therefore, the Christian missionary has only one priority and that is to preach Christ crucified and risen to set men free to worship God in spirit and truth; and we must do so without criticizing or disrespecting other people’s religious traditions.

3. **People Groups Hidden from View:** The third external obstacle missionaries must overcome is the fact that many of the unreached people groups around the world are unreached because they live in remote areas that are hard to reach. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 is to make disciples of all people – to the ends of the earth (see HANDOUT Map of Unreached People Groups).

How beautiful upon the mountains  
Are the feet of him who brings good news,  
Who proclaims peace,  
Who brings glad tidings of good things,  
Who proclaims salvation,  
Who says to Zion,  
“Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7).

Unreached people may be hidden from our awareness, not only by geography but also by language and culture. Depending upon how they are counted, there are around 2,700 languages with over 7,000 individual dialects spoken around the world today. The Bible has been translated into about 250 languages. The objective of missions is to get the gospel into every country and to make disciples of all peoples so that those disciples will in turn make more disciples, which will result in exponential growth of the church amongst previously unreached people groups.

4. **Persecution:** The persecution of Christians is the fourth external strategy of Satan that must be overcome by missionaries. The persecution of God's people has been a key strategy of the devil since the beginning. Job's story should be a reminder to all that we live in a Fallen world that is hostile to anyone who belongs to God. In Matthew 10:16-42, Jesus warned His disciples that He was sending them out "as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." In that passage, Jesus told His disciples, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Jesus calls upon all disciples to lay down their lives, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." The missionary's call is to go to a hurting world, dying of spiritual thirst, and in the face of evil and persecution, give "...one of these little ones a cup of cold water" for Jesus' sake.

Too often, a missionary has an idealistic vision of being received with glory and honor when they enter a region where the "good news" of salvation in Christ Jesus has not been heard before. However, it is often the case that they will be met with suspicion and hostility as a foreign intruder in the affairs of the people. Even in places where the gospel has made an inroad, missionaries must "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8). Missionaries must be prepared to meet any persecution, no matter what form it may take.

But Satan's strategy is not only to apply external resistance to the advancement of the Gospel, but it also involves internal obstacles to the missionary that may come from the church, family, or personal issues. In fact, Rankin and Stetzer argue that the devil's most effective strategy is to hinder the missionary from declaring the excellencies of Christ to the lost by the church itself. Missionaries must remember that the greatest resistance to Jesus' ministry came from the Jews (note John 8:12-59), His family (John 7:1-5), and sometimes from His own disciples (Matthew 16:21-23).

Satan hinders the mission of God by convincing Christians that **the Great Commission is optional**. Jesus' instructions to His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 are intended to make the church a force for evangelism. Christians should be making a powerful and positive impact for the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth. The stance of far too many leaders in the church today is that the church

should be a comfortable and safe sheep pen to house the sheep on Sunday mornings. But it is clear from Jesus' own teachings and from His Apostles' letters that the church is intended to be a training ground where disciples are made and sent out into the world to evangelize and make more disciples.

Quoting Rankin and Stetzer again: "When priority is given to comfortable facilities and convenient activities benefitting the community of the redeemed rather than taking the gospel to a lost world, you have located a 'missions-optional' church." The Devil is not upset by inward-focused churches that fill Sunday services with performances designed to entertain the complacent and sermons that comfort lukewarm Christians. But when Christians wake up from their complacency and see that their responsibility to "go" and seek and save the lost, make disciples, and glorify the Lord among the nations, then Satan shudders with fear. Christians should be taught and trained from the beginning for a life on mission with God in this world.

The second internal obstacle Satan uses to hinder missionaries is to **erode the authority of God's Word**. When the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture is questioned by so-called "Christian" scholars, the motivation for missions is lost. Missionaries who are not absolutely convinced of the truth they are preaching will be ineffective witnesses to the nations. Christians who are not sure that the Bible is God's Holy Word will concentrate on "good works" like digging a well, repairing a building, and providing for the needs of the poor. All of these things may be good and necessary, but good works by themselves will not convince anyone that Jesus is God's only begotten Son who came and died upon the cross for the sins of the world; and that faith in Jesus Christ alone will save them for eternity.

Another internal strategy Satan uses to prevent the church from sending out missionaries is to convince Christians that **only a few are called to go on mission** while the rest of God's people are exempt. Christian leaders who tell otherwise healthy Christians that it is okay to stay at home and never share the gospel with others are failing to fulfill their most important responsibility. Leaders who convince Christians that only a few well-trained, seminary educated, and well-financed, professionals are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, preachers, and teachers at home and abroad do not know what they are talking about.

Christians must be taught from the beginning that all are called to participate in the Great Commission. Some may be called to a mission field nearby; some may be called to a mission field far away; some may be called for a lifetime on a foreign mission field; some may be called for specific period of time. But all Christians are called to live a life "on mission" with God in this world. Christians who make no effort to share the gospel with others are like the servant who hid his mina in a handkerchief in Jesus' parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:11-27).

It has been said that “Faith is the bridge between God’s assignment and our obedience.” Therefore, Satan will try to hinder God’s mission by **eroding the faith of God’s people**. Questioning and doubting Christians will never have the motivation to make the necessary sacrifices to be on mission with God in this world. Without the necessary faith, Christians will stay home, and the Great Commission will remain incomplete.

Any Sunday morning Christians may be inspired by a stirring message on the call to missions. The pastor may ask for a show of hands from those who say they are willing to go and serve God on a short or long-term mission. Many willing hands may be raised at that moment, but in the end, only a very few will actually make the necessary sacrifices to move from the “willing” to those who “will” go; As Jesus said, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14). It takes faith in God and in His promises to move from the side of the willing to those who will answer the call to missions.

Satan is always working from within to hinder God’s mission by seeking to **destroy the spiritual vitality of the church**. Christian leaders who tolerate sinful, selfish, faithless, half-hearted, self-absorbed members of their congregation as long as the attendance is high, and the tithes and offerings keep rolling in will discover in the end that they had been working against God.

“And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.’” (Luke 12:42–46).

Christians who live self-indulgent, unholy lives are unfit and ill-equipped disciples of the Master. Self-absorbed Christians are not looking for the Master’s return and will be caught unaware when He returns. Satan knows that spiritually weak Christians – those who are prayerless, faithless, disobedient, and have little or no interest in Bible study – will be unwilling and unable to fulfill the Great Commission of God given to His church to fulfill until the Day of His glorious return at the end of the age.

#### THE ISSUE OF MISSIONARY BURNOUT

Before making the commitment for full-time work on a foreign mission field, it is important to **count the cost**: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish...’” (Lk 14:28–30). The life of a missionary can be highly stressful, depending upon their chosen mission field and how long they are committed to stay. “Thousands of fully committed missionaries are happy, fulfilled, and successful in their ministry. The real source of burnout is not commitment; it is overwork. Missionaries deplete their physical and mental resources as they allow their personal values, along with those of the missionary community and the broader society, to impose unrealistic expectations on their ministry.” *Encountering Missionary Life and Work*, Tom Steffen, Lois McKinney Douglas, © 2008, Pub. Baker Academic, p.314

Although there are no comprehensive studies on the numbers of missionaries who leave the field every year and their reasons for leaving, reports from various sources indicate that approximately 6.5% of missionaries leave the field every year, which can mean roughly half of all missionaries leave the field within ten years. Of the reasons cited for leaving, most of them are considered “preventable.” Steffen and Douglas note in the same chapter of their book that “There are several different causes for burnout. *Wear and tear* are important among these. They can be particularly severe in situations of danger, when missionaries are sometimes called on to work far beyond their own human resources.” Depending upon the mission field, missionaries sustain an enormous level of ongoing stress, which makes them strongly susceptible to serious physical injury, depression, or sickness over time.

Missionaries departing from modern Western countries where health care, sanitation, food, and excellent infrastructure make life comfortable will experience a much higher level of stress if they enter a mission field where the standards are much, much lower than what they are used to. Culture shock is almost always unavoidable because living as foreigner in a strange and unfamiliar culture, and attempting to communicate with others in a language the missionary has not yet mastered only adds to the normal stress that any radical change in lifestyle brings. It is only natural for most missionaries to experience times of doubt or regret for having made the decision to leave home, friends, and family for a few years or a lifetime to embark on a course filled with overwhelming challenges and few rewards in this lifetime. A few things every missionary must do to keep from burning out quickly:

- **Take time off to rest and recuperate** – especially after a time of illness.
- **Set realistic goals for your work**. Missionaries often enter the mission field with high hopes of making a major impact from their efforts.

- **Don't be a "workaholic."** Steffen and Douglas wrote, "Their sense of fulfillment and satisfaction comes through work, and their self-confidence is bound up with success. They drive themselves to prevent failure. Even though others advise them to cut back and take care of other areas of their lives, they continue to be controlled by work."
- **Leave your psychological baggage back home.** Before packing up and leaving for a mission field take some time for self-examination. No one is perfect; we all have mental and emotional scars from past experiences. However, it is important to come to terms with feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, issues from being raised in a dysfunctional family, and feelings of guilt from past sins, etc.. Without denying our past or refusing to forgive others and ourselves, we must be like Paul who wrote, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12–14).

#### RETURNING FROM THE MISSION FIELD

The challenges for the missionary do not end when the mission is over. No matter what the reasons are for leaving the field – good or bad – the missionary often feels some degree of regret. After many months or years living as a missionary, it is often a letdown to return home and reenter their old life. If the missionary returns home expecting flowers strewn at their feet and a parade in their honor for having made such a great sacrifice for Christ, they will be disappointed. Upon their return almost, all missionaries will quickly fade into the background; whatever support they received while on the field will quickly dry up because the people who supported them when they were "on mission" will believe that the missionary no longer needs help.

Depending upon the circumstances of their departure and how quickly they are able to restore their lifestyle – within days, weeks, or months of their return from the mission field it is normal for most missionaries to have feelings of regret for having gone in the first place, or for having left the mission field before everything they had hoped to accomplish was completed. Their feelings of regret may be increased by others who question whether that person was really called to be a missionary in the first place; did they not have enough faith or trust in God to stay the rest of their life on the field?

The best way to avoid regrets is to be open and honest with God, yourself, and other trusted friends and family about your feelings through the entire process of preparing to go on the mission. Communicate what you are experiencing while on mission and continue to talk with God and others about your feelings as you prepare to return home.

Finally, be on guard for any signs of *posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)*. Except for extreme cases such as war, armed robberies, rapes, and kidnappings, after months or years on the mission field, most missionaries learn to cope with a higher degree of stress. However, after coming home, repressed feelings of fear, or anxiety can rise to the surface and be manifested in insomnia, fatigue, irritability, or repeated images coming to mind of shocking experiences from their time on the field. It is important to understand that stress is a normal part of being on mission with God. The best way to "destress" after returning from the field is to allow yourself time to rest, reflect, and pray about all that transpired on the field. Talk to trusted friends and advisors if you are experiencing any signs or PTSD while on the field or after your return. And remember what Jesus said, "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:9-11)

Missionaries must not fall into the trap of believing that once they have left the foreign mission field, "a lifetime of following Christ" has ended abruptly. Wherever the disciple goes, and whatever the disciple does must be done as a follower of the Master. Our mission may be different depending on where we are and to whom God has called us to preach the gospel, but we must follow Jesus wherever He leads us. Whether at home or abroad, every believer is called to be "on mission" with God and follow Christ to the end of their life on earth.

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON TEN

1. Considering the many hardships and challenges the missionary may face on the mission field, how important is "dying to the giants of self" to the ability of the missionary to survive for the long-term?
2. What is the best way for missionaries to challenge counterfeit gospels and false religions?

3. Paul said in Romans 10:14-15, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?” Immediately following those words, Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:7; 53:1; 65:1-2; Nahum 1:15; Psalm 19:4; and Deuteronomy 32:21. What is the only conclusion about the missionary calling of the church that can be drawn from this entire passage of Romans?
4. How do Satan’s strategies to hinder or stop missionaries relate to Romans 10:14-21?
5. How important is it to “count the cost” before departing for the mission field?
6. Do all missionaries experience the same challenges while on the mission field?
7. Besides the obvious Christ-like behaviors of living in holiness, righteousness, and truth, what things should missionaries do to be successful and avoid burning out?
8. What are some of the challenges missionaries face after returning home?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-11

### THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP “AN UNSWERVING CONTINUANCE IN HIS WORD”

“If you continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.’ (John 8:31). For real discipleship there must be continuance. It is easy enough to start well, to burst forth in a blaze of glory. But the test of reality is endurance to the end. Any man who looks back after putting his hand to the plow is not fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62). Spasmodic obedience to the Scriptures will not do. Christi wants those who will follow Him in constant, unquestioning obedience.” William MacDonald, *True Discipleship*, © 1975, Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, p.8

#### THE MISSION IS THE MESSAGE

NOTE: A portion of this lesson is taken from *Messiah: The Mission of Jesus of Nazareth*, (Chapter 3, “The Messiah’s Vision”, Copyright © 2022, by Frederick Osborn

#### The Vision and Mission of Jesus

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:4-5

The Lord had made it as clear as possible that the Messiah would be sent to the Jews according to His perfect timing (Daniel 9:24-27). Once Jesus was publicly announced to the nation at His baptism (Matthew 3:17; Luke 3:21-22), the Messiah announced that He had come “**to fulfill all righteousness.**” In His public sermons and especially in His parables, Jesus defined the single vision that would guide His mission to glorify His Father to the nation.

Before we can fully comprehend what was that vision and how it relates to His mission, it is important to first define what vision is in the biblical sense of the word. The word “vision” has multiple meanings; it may be used in the Bible to refer to **messages sent from God as prophecy**, or it may be used to indicate **the**

**ability to see the world with correct judgment.** Here we will define the word Vision as the Messiah’s power to see the world as it is from God’s perspective and to see what will come to be. In a **prophetic vision**, the seer has an experience in which a person, thing, or event appears convincingly to their mind, although it is not physically present. Visions in the Bible often appear with the assistance of a **divine or heavenly messenger** announcing or appearing in the vision. However, in Jesus’ case, because He is the divine Son of God, He was at once the object of the vision and the one who experienced it. (Note His transfiguration described in Matthew 17:1-13 and Mark 9:3-10.)

#### HOW THE BIBLE DEFINES “VISION”

**Vision** is the act or power of expecting that which will or may come to be – as in a prophetic vision

**Vision** is an experience in which a person, thing, or event appears convincingly to the mind, although not actually present. Visions often appear with the assistance of a divine or heavenly messenger appearing in the vision.

VISION COMES FROM GOD

IDENTIFIES STRENGTHS

SOLIDIFIES ETERNAL VALUES

INCLUDES OTHERS

OVER AND ABOVE HUMAN CAPABILITIES

NARRATE THE VISION

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” John 6:63

#### **Vision Comes from God**

Jesus understood that the vision guiding His mission to the Jewish nation came from His Father, and that to fulfill His mission meant **doing and speaking** only what His Father told Him to do or speak at every moment and in every situation. So, the Messiah did nothing by His own initiative. He did nothing spontaneously or in a careless way. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” (John 4:34). He said, “Most assuredly, I say

to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do...” (John 5:19). Jesus said again, “...for the works which the Father has given Me to finish – the very works that I do – bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” (John 5:36). He also said in context of His authority to judge the nation, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Matthew 11:27).

In the Scriptures, visions are given to specific individuals for specific purposes. However, there are common threads which run through those visions. Anyone who received a vision from God was not acting on their own initiative but were being used as divine instruments to **communicate God’s word** to the people. The unifying themes found in biblical visions bind the diverse times, places, and circumstances of the visions to the Bible’s overarching vision of **the Kingdom of God** (or heaven).

#### **Strengthens the One Who Receives**

One of the keys used to distinguish a true vision from the Lord from the overabundance of false visions from the idolatrous prophets of nations surrounding God’s people is how that vision strengthens the person who received the vision to accomplish **God’s will**. A vision sent from God will reveal (identify) the spiritual strengths of character needed to fulfill the mission for which the vision was given. There are numerous examples in the Scriptures, but just one example of this found in the calling of Gideon (Judges 6:12-16). In this vision, the Lord addresses Gideon as a mighty man of valor, even though up to this point, Gideon had shown no evidence of valor. But the Lord knew that Gideon’s strength to accomplish God’s will would have to come from the quality of bravery in the face of long odds against him.

In Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-10), the devil comes to entice Him to make His ministry self-serving. But in every temptation to divert His ministry, Jesus overcame the devil with His Father’s word. In the end, Jesus’ mission would depend upon His absolute submission to His Father’s will. At every point in His public ministry to the Jewish nation, Jesus made it absolutely clear that He had not come to do His own will or to glorify Himself, but He came to do His Father’s will and glorify His Father, even to His death. Jesus said, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” (John 5:30).

#### **Solidifies Eternal Values**

In every case, a vision that truly comes from God will reinforce God's Law and the eternal values those laws represent. Every step of the way, Jesus affirmed the absolute authority of **His Father's Law**. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-19).

Intricately woven into His mission was Jesus' identification with His Father's power to grant eternal life and judgment: Jesus said, "...as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son..." He continued, saying He had been given "authority to execute judgment..." and "My judgment is righteous..." (John 5:26-30).

### **Includes Others**

Another key factor to confirm that a vision truly comes from God is that the vision is never for the benefit of the visionary alone, but the fulfillment of that vision will include others. In the Bible, visions are given for **the benefit of all believers**. To fulfill a vision from God, the person who receives it must involve others in the mission. The stories of the Judges are prime examples of how God gives His chosen servant a vision, which eventually involved the entire community to fulfill it. Ezra and Nehemiah were given the vision from God to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem after the exile, but to fulfill their missions these men of God had to include all of the returning exiles.

Jesus was no exception to this principle of God-given visions. In fact, Jesus spent more time teaching and training His disciples than any other activity on earth. Luke 10:1-24 is a clear example of how Jesus needed to include others to fulfill the ultimate goal of His mission to seek and save the lost from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

### **Over And Above Human Capabilities**

Any vision that comes from God will be beyond the human capabilities of the visionary to fulfill it. Abraham is a great example of this principle. He received his vision while living as a childless, nomadic shepherd in the land of Ur. God gave him a vision to take possession of the land of Canaan, for descendants, that kings would come from him, and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed

through him. No doubt, Abraham must have felt he was given an impossible vision, but we know today, that God was able to do what no human can do.

Moses was another example of vision that comes from God. At the time Moses received his vision to go and lead the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, Moses was an exile from Pharaoh and had no influence over God's people. He had disappeared from Egypt forty years before and had melted into the desert to tend sheep in obscurity. But God gave Moses signs that His power would enable Moses to fulfill that vision (Ex. 4:1-9).

Joshua, Moses' chosen successor, would lead the Israelites over the Jordan to take possession of the land. After forty years of wilderness wandering, a new generation of Israelites were poised to enter the Promised Land. But Moses was dead, and Joshua was now in charge. No doubt, Joshua felt inadequate for the task at hand. Would the people follow him and obey his commands the way they did for Moses? What if he failed as a military commander? At this point in time, Joshua receives a vision from God telling him not to fear because God is with him. Joshua knew without the power of God he could not fulfill the vision and conquer the warlike tribes occupying Canaan.

The signs and wonders Jesus performed came from His divine nature as the Son of God. The Jews saw this, and Nicodemus acknowledged it when he said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (John 3:2). After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus' apostles declared that it was the power of God that raised Him from the dead (Acts 3:15; 4:10). So, without His Father's power to resurrect His Son, Jesus the Messiah could not fulfill the vision He was given by His Father at the very beginning: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13).

### **Narrate (Communicate) the Vision**

No vision that comes from God is of any use to others or can include others if the visionary is unwilling or unable to narrate the vision in clear, understandable language. The visionaries of both Testaments were constantly told to "go and tell" the vision to others:

"Moreover He said to me, 'Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. And He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.'

So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. Then He said to me: ‘Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.’” Ezekiel 3:1-4

Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, ‘Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.’ So I went to the angel and said to him, ‘Give me the little book.’ And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.’ Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.’” Revelation 10:8-11

A large portion of the Messiah’s public ministry was devoted to communicating His vision to those who flocked to see Him. In His public sermons and parables, Jesus did not hesitate to communicate His reasons for coming: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” (John 10:10b – 11). Jesus was aware that “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” (Matthew 24:35), and He had every intention to make sure His disciples and those who followed after them would remember His teachings (John 14:25-26; Matthew 28:20).

Privately, Jesus took the time to teach His disciples **the mysteries of the kingdom** that those on the outside could not comprehend (Matthew 13:11-13). Sometimes Jesus would speak the mysteries of His kingdom in parables and at other times He would speak to them in plain language. But either way, the Messiah was not satisfied until He knew that His disciples had grasped His words. “It is the Spirit who gives life.” Jesus said, “the flesh profits nothing. The words I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)

### **The Word of God Reveals the Vision.**

Now that we understand what the Scriptures call vision, we must ask the obvious questions: “What was the Messiah’s vision, and how did that vision impact His mission?” These are no small questions because Jesus’ vision is what defined His Messianic mission on the earth.

From the beginning, the Creator had a **single vision**. His vision guided every act of creation. All that the Father spoke, and all that the Father did were designed

to fulfill His vision for the universe and the world He created. Jesus, the Son of God was no less guided by that vision than is His Father. So, when the “fulness of time” arrived and God sent forth His Son, it was in complete accord with that original vision for everything He created.

“Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, and said: “I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.” Psalm 89:19

The Gospels reveal the **Messiah’s vision**. The first words of Jesus that Mark’s Gospel records set in motion the Messiah’s ministry: “Now after John was put in prison. Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14, 15). Matthew tells us that shortly after Jesus returned from His forty-day fast in the Wilderness, and before He called His first disciples, Jesus “... began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matthew 4:17b). A few verses later, Matthew wrote, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their Synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom...” (4:23).

A major turning point in Jesus’ public preaching came when He began to teach the masses in parables. All three synoptic Gospels include Jesus’ key parable of the **“Sower and the Soils”** (Matthew chapter thirteen, Mark chapter four, and Luke chapter eight). The meaning of this parable and His disciples’ wonder at His change in messaging from preaching in sermons to the more cryptic language of parables, led Jesus to tell His disciples, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”

In Matthew chapter thirteen, Jesus’ vision comes into clear focus in His parables. Jesus introduces each of these parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” By the time the reader finishes chapter thirteen, there is no doubt that the revelation of the kingdom of heaven is the guiding vision for His ministry. Luke says it plainly when he records Jesus’ statement, “I must preach the kingdom of God... because for this purpose I have been sent.” (4:43). John does not ignore the Lord’s vision either. In the key chapter describing the Messiah’s encounter with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, Jesus said that unless a person is born again, they cannot see or enter the kingdom of God (3:3, 5).

### **Vision Defines the Mission**

Now that we know that the Messiah’s vision is the Kingdom of God (or heaven), we can begin to see how that vision defined His mission. Vision is what

defines the mission, for without a vision a mission will lose direction and purpose. Therefore, everywhere Jesus went, everything Jesus did, and every encounter with someone along the way, Jesus had only one purpose in mind: **to reveal the kingdom of God.**

Throughout His mission, Jesus was constantly pressed in on every side by people who were seeking their own agendas or to have their own needs met. People wanted Jesus to conform to their beliefs and to their expectations of who and what the Messiah would be. The Jews believed that the kingdom of God would be an exclusively **Jewish kingdom**, it would be established by **military power**, and its fulness would come in some **distant future**. Following a single vision – the vision the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had from the beginning of creation – was the only way Jesus the Messiah could fulfill His mission (ministry) to the Jewish nation, and through them to all the nations of the world. This meant that Jesus would concentrate His preaching/teaching ministry to correct the distorted visions of the kingdom of God held by the Jewish nation.

Once we understand the vision of Jesus the Messiah, His mission begins to unfold. If the totality of Jesus’ mission was to die upon the cross and resurrect from the tomb after three days, then the first time Jesus walked into the temple grounds and overturned the tables of the money changers, He would have allowed Himself to be arrested and killed then. But Jesus’ mission was more complex than that. The Messiah’s mission would be three-fold:

- **To seek and save the lost sheep of the house of Israel.** Jesus said, “... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10. He also said, “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” (Luke 9:55). Nowhere is Jesus’ mission to seek and save made clearer than in His parables of the Shepherd (John 10:7-18 and Luke 15:4-7).
- **To make disciples who would carry the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth.** Jesus said to those He called to be His disciples, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19). He also told His disciples, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God...” (Luke 8:10 & Mark 4:11). Jesus makes disciples who are sent out to draw people into the kingdom the same way that fishermen draw fish into their nets. Only disciples are shown the mystery of God’s kingdom.

In the same way that the Father gave His power and authority to His Son, Jesus transfers that power and authority to His disciples “Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick...” (Luke 9:1, 2 ff).

To prepare His disciples for the world’s hatred, Jesus told them that “A disciple is not above his teacher, and a servant like his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.” (Matthew 10:24, 25). Jesus’ disciples would have to be strong and bold to fulfill their Mission. But Jesus would watch over them as if they were His own (Matthew 12:46-50).

His disciples would share the love that the Father has for the Son and that the Son has for His disciples, ““By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

- **And to glorify the Father in every word and deed.**

Everywhere Jesus went, everything Jesus did, and everything Jesus said was motivated by the same thing: to glorify His Father. Yes, Jesus had compassion upon all those who came to Him in need of a miracle, but His motivation for healing was for His Father to be glorified. often We read in Matthew 9:8, Luke 7:11 and Luke 13:13 that after Jesus healed someone all those present “glorified God”.

Jesus made it clear that He did not come to do His own will, but the will of His Father and that by the Son doing the Father’s will – even unto death – His Father would be glorified (Mark 10:45; Luke 23:47; John 12:23-28; John 13:31, 32; and John 17:1-5). Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:12–13).

**Before Jesus Ascended to His Father, He Passed This Same Vision and Mission to His Disciples and to All Those Who Would Come After Them.**

Before Jesus ascended to His Father, He passed this same Vision and Mission to His disciples, and all those who would come after them. After affirming that “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...” (Matthew 28:18), gave “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28:19-20) for His followers to fulfill until the hour of His Second Coming.

Jesus had already given His disciples a clear vision of the kingdom of heaven in His parables and private teachings. To those whom the mysteries of His Father’s kingdom were given, He said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14). Then, in His final instructions to His disciples before His

departure, Jesus brought into clear focus the mission of the church, which is identical to His mission from His Father:

- “Go...” (seek and save the lost)
- “Make disciples” like Him of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus commanded His disciples.
- “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” His disciples will glorify the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit to the ends of the earth and to the ends of the age.

In John 17:20-26, Jesus said, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for all those disciples who will believe in Me through their word.” Jesus prayed that the glory which His Father gave Him, would be given them, “...that they may be one just as We are one.” Jesus prayed in that same prayer “that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

The vision and mission of the church is our reason for existence (John 15:15-17). We are no longer called “servants” by our Master, “for a servant does not know what his master is doing.” His disciples have an intimacy with their Lord and now are now called “friends” who have heard from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. Jesus has made known to His disciples the mysteries of His kingdom, He has chosen us, and has commissioned us to communicate His Word to all nations until He returns. “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.”

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON ELEVEN

1. The Bible defines “Vision” as the act or power of expecting that which will or may come to be – as in a prophetic vision; or as an experience in which a person, thing, or event appears convincingly to the mind, although not actually present. A vision often appears with the assistance of a divine or heavenly messenger. How do Jesus’ teachings on the kingdom of heaven conform to the Bible’s definition of “vision”?
2. How did Jesus’ vision for the kingdom of God define His mission?

3. We know that Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom of heaven is from the Father. How does the acrostic, V-I-S-I-O-N, help us identify what is a message from God and what is not?
4. Henry T. Blackaby said, “Make no mistake, there is a difference between mission and missions. By mission, I mean the total redemptive purpose of God to establish His kingdom. Missions, on the other hand, is the activity of God’s people – the church – to proclaim and to demonstrate the kingdom of God cross-culturally to the world.” How do the terms “mission” and “missions” relate to Jesus’ vision of the kingdom and the Great Commission?
5. Why is it essential for a disciple of Jesus to possess “an unswerving continuance in God’s word” in order to fulfill the Great Commission?

## SGM EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS DISCIPLESHIP 102-12

### THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP “ABIDING IN CHRIST”

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” John 15:4-8

Dan Stone and Greg Smith wrote in their book, *The Rest of the Gospel*: “Those of us who write and teach extensively about our union with Christ emphasize being over doing. And we should. In the context of our spirit union, doing flows from being. But if we are to give Jesus free reign to live His life through us – if we are to truly experience His abundant life – we are going to have to make some choices. One of those choices involves detaching ourselves from a preoccupation with the values of this world.” (p. 215)

“We must keep ourselves in the love of God and stop religious and worldly activity long enough to hear God’s still small voice. This involves the skill of abiding – continuing to be present, to hold, and to be held in God’s love in every situation, contradiction, and crisis that is presented to us on our journey. Abiding is the skill of being able to hunker down and effectively draw upon the ‘supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ’ (see Phil. 1:19). It is the means to being conformed to the image of His Son. Like the simplicity of faith alone, the Kingdom comes to us in such a quiet and uncomplicated manner that we can easily walk right over it, missing the strength it provides us.” Bob Mumford

All who have carefully read and studied Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7) consider it to be the zenith of His public teachings for the multitudes that came to hear Him. Some have called the Sermon on the Mount “The Bill of Rights and the Constitution for citizens of the kingdom of heaven”

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because it presents the rights and privileges for all those who wish to live as citizens of God’s kingdom. In the same way, John 13 – 17 can be considered the absolute teachings for His disciples – those who have left the wayside and abandoned all to follow Him.

The real-life drama that is the setting for these chapters intensifies the critical importance of these verses. It is the night before Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was the evening of the feast of Passover. Jesus knew this would be His last night on earth before His death, burial, and resurrection and before returning to His Father. The devil had already entered into Judas and was moments away from going to carry out his plan to betray Jesus. His other disciples were still struggling to understand everything, and Jesus knew they were about to face their greatest test of faith when they watched their Master being arrested and dragged off into the night to be beaten, kicked, whipped, spat upon, and then brutally murdered on the Roman instrument of supreme inhumanity – the cross.

John’s narrative reminds us that as Jesus lovingly sat across from His disciples, He was fully aware of the truth that His Father had given everything into His hands, and He was about to return to His eternal dwelling with the Godhead. In His most supreme act of love and sacrifice before His Passion on the cross, Jesus got up from the table, removed His outer garments, and taking the position of the lowest house-slave, began to wash His disciples’ feet (including the one who was about to betray Him). Peter, still not fully broken, attempted to argue with Jesus, saying, “Master, you shouldn’t be washing our feet like this!” After He had finished washing the disciples’ feet, He said to them, “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (13:13-15).

“I want my understanding of Christ being my life to be a lifestyle, not an adjunct. It’s not a piece of the pie; it is the pie... Christ is all in all. We want *the all*. And we... want to yield *the all* of us to Him. But we can’t do that if we’re attached to the world. Jesus lived his earthly life this way, as a detached person. Not detached from loving people but detached from the world. He only wanted to do the will of the Father. There wasn’t anything in the external realm that could enhance his identity. That’s what I mean by detached. Jesus could operate in this world with complete freedom because there wasn’t anything in this world that He wanted to possess more than He wanted to be possessed by His Father.” Dan Stone

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The Passover meal continued. Quoting from the Scriptures, Jesus announced that one of them sitting at the table would “lift up his heel against Me” (13:18). The tension mounted as the disciples looked at one another wondering which one it was and secretly knew each one of them was capable of betraying Jesus. Then Jesus released Judas to “go quickly” and put into motion what was already in his heart to do. Once again Jesus proclaimed that His time of departure from them had come. He told them, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another” (13:34-35). Peter boldly proclaimed his commitment to lay down his life for Jesus if he had to. But Jesus responded by warning Him that before the dawn breaks, he will have denied his Master three times.

“The discovery of a mixture within ourselves is no surprise, nor shock to God as our father. Jesus’ disciples struggled with mixture, too, and had to be taught the urgent and necessary skill of abiding as Jesus prepared them for the chaos surrounding His death and departure to the Father.” Bob Mumford

At this point Jesus began to comfort and encourage His disciples. “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me...” He told them that His departure was not to abandon them, but that He was going to prepare a place for them so that “where I am, there you may be also...” Still, His disciples were confused, Thomas cried out, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus, replied with one of His greatest revelations about Himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (14:6-7). Jesus assured His disciples that because He was going to His Father, He will send them “another Helper, that He might abide with you forever...” Jesus encouraged them that the Holy Spirit would continue on with them from where Jesus had to leave them. He told them, “Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid...” and assured them once more that He would return again.

“The apostle John gives us the application to abiding, the most basic of all spiritual skills. By using the word more than 80 times in his writing, he shows us the centrality of this issue. Abiding is a continued and uninterrupted relationship between Jesus and the believer.” Bob Mumford

John 15:1-10 contains some of Jesus’ key verses on the abiding relationship Jesus shares with His disciples. Note that there are four elements of this passage from John 15:

1. the vine,
2. the branches,
3. the vinedresser,
4. and the fruit.

All are related in one way or another to the abiding Jesus said is necessary for His Life (Agape) to be manifested in the disciple. The image of the vine and branches, like the parable of the “Sower and Soils” was something His disciples could easily grasp and understand. The Holy Spirit had used the idea of the vine before (Psalms 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 19:10-14; and Hosea 10:1). Jesus used the same image of the nation of Israel as God’s vineyard in another parable (Matthew 21:22-36). (See HANDOUT “Barriers to Fruitfulness”).

However, in John 15, Jesus is introducing a whole new and much deeper dimension to the image of the vine and branches. An image that is intended to communicate the present reality of the abiding life of Christ that is essential to produce the true spiritual fruit of the kingdom that every disciple must produce. Warren Wiersbe pointed out in his commentary on these verses that, “Our union with Christ is a living union, so we may bear fruit; a loving union, so that we may enjoy Him; and a lasting union, so that we need not be afraid.”

“Picture Jesus as he prepares to go to the cross Praying to the Father, he recounts his ministry in the world. He begins, ‘I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you have me to do.’ Then he describes that work. What is shocking is that when Jesus summarizes his work on earth, he doesn’t start reliving all the great sermons he preached and all the people who came to listen to him. He doesn’t talk about the amazing miracles he performed... He doesn’t even mention bringing the dead back to life. Instead he talks repeatedly about the small group of men God had given him out of the world. They were the work God had given to him. They were, quite literally, his life.”  
David Platt

Notice that immediately after explaining to His disciples that the mysteries of the kingdom are not for those who are on the wayside, and just before Jesus explains the key parable of the “Sower and the Soils” to them, Jesus says to His disciples, “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

(Matthew 13:16-17). The pattern for Jesus' teaching in parables is to wait until He is alone with His disciples before explaining to them the hidden meaning of His words. Here Jesus is alone with His disciples so He is teaching them plainly to prepare them for how they will carry on after He is no longer physically present with them.

As is true with every other parable, Jesus is using a **natural process** from the world around us to reveal a **deeper spiritual truth**. The vine, the branches, the vinedresser, and the fruit all reveal something significant and necessary for a life of **discipleship**. Abiding in the vine is not for the good pleasure of the branches; it has a purpose. God the Father saves those He loves from death and destruction and grafts them into the vine for HIS pleasure and for HIS purposes (Note Romans 11:11-25). Our Father in heaven is the Maker and Owner of everything, including us. Therefore, He has the right to use us as He pleases. He is the Potter we are the clay (Jeremiah 18:5); He is the Refiner and we are the gold and silver purified through the fire (Zechariah 13:9). He is the Vinedresser and we are the branches pruned to bear much fruit for His kingdom.

“Fruit is the issue. God is never impressed or satisfied with the outward manifestation of leaves without the accompanying fruit. Father will cultivate and prune by means of de-centering and re-centering until we can produce Kingdom fruit... (John 15:3) This is the Eternal Seed given to us as the wedding garment in the new birth. The result of the new birth is fruit that brings a revelation of God's glory... We must cultivate the Eternal Seed until that DNA which the Seed contains is brought to its full purpose, which is the Son of God replicated in the life of the ordinary believer. Abiding results in Christ formed in us.” Bob Mumford

In His final words to His disciples, Jesus revealed the spiritual truth that it is the life of Christ flowing into them that produces the fruit of the Kingdom. “Apart from Me” Jesus said, the life of the disciple cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. A disjointed union, or an injured, broken intimacy with God the Father, rather than a covenantal break will produce none of the good fruit of abiding for which the Father waits. A disciple who has grasped the implications of Agape allows God's love to be reproduced within them. Matthew 5:44b-45 says, ‘love...in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven...’ “The biblical evidence that the Kingdom has come and God's will is being done on the earth as it is in Heaven is discovered when God's love is replicated.” Bob Mumford.

In these verses, Jesus is revealing a critical truth for His disciples to understand. The workings of the Kingdom are **a mystery** to those who do not belong to Christ; they cannot see this truth or understand it for the Kingdom of God cannot be seen (John 3:3) or entered into (John 3:5) unless one is born again (**attached to the vine**). Jesus uses the image of the natural relationship of the vine and the branch to produce fruit to illustrate the spiritual relationship of Christ and His disciples to the production of spiritual fruit in the life of the believer. If the disciple misses this point, their Christian life will be thrown into reverse, and they will not produce true fruit for the kingdom. If the condition continues, the life of the vine will stop flowing into the branch and its fate will be as the fruitless and useless branch that the vinedresser cuts off of the vine and throws into the fire.

The branch (**disciple**) must be attached to (**abide**) the vine (**Christ**) in order to bear the fruit of the Kingdom (Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9). It is through the abiding that the life of Christ by His Spirit flows into the disciple; without that life, it is impossible for the disciple to produce true spiritual fruit. Apart from abiding, the believer will be frustrated trying to produce fruit by their own efforts. They will go out and do what they believe Christians should do and try to live the “good Christian life.” They may succeed at doing good things – things they believe will please God and give them a good standing in their church and in the community. They will want to show kindness to others, live a good moral life; and become active in their church. They may even serve as deacons or ushers and be faithful tithers – all in the belief that doing these things are the fruit God is looking for. They will absolutely deny that they are engaging in works-righteousness because they know they are saved by grace through faith alone and therefore their motivation for doing such things is not for the sake of righteousness. However, what they are missing is Christ living His life in and through them. The true and everlasting fruit comes only through abiding in Him in a deeply spiritual intimacy of knowing and being known by Him.

Apart from abiding in Christ, believers will show little if any true spiritual fruit. These believers will live lifestyles of little discernible difference from their unsaved neighbors. They often share the same interests, values, life-goals, and beliefs with those who never attend church. The very best they can produce is a hybrid fruit – a mixture of self (Eros) in every fruit. The main characteristic of a hybrid fruit is that it contains **no seed within** and is incapable of **reproduction**. But more often than not, these Christians are living a double-life, keeping their sins hidden from others and their strongholds buried deep within while wanting to live undisturbed and unchallenged to deal with those things they must die to in order to be truly transformed by the power of Christ.

“When we choose the things of this world, our salvation is not lost, but our intimacy with God, as a Father is essentially out of order. Like the prodigal, we have actually run away from home. When the son returned, it was his father who saw him from a long way off and welcomed him with open arms, just as God stands ready to welcome us as we seek to restore intimacy with Him.” Bob Mumford

Once again, it is easy to get confused here. “Soul winning” as often encouraged by churches, is usually attached to some kind of program to bring an unsaved neighbor or family member to church or bring them to a point where they pray a “sinner’s prayer” and then encourage them to start attending a church. However, another principle of nature is important to recognize at this point. And that is the principle that kind reproduces only **its own kind**. Christians may be encouraged and motivated by a well-meaning pastor to boost church attendance by a “soul winning” program. But what they will get is more of the same fruitless Christians – kind reproduce kind. However, only those disciples who are truly abiding in Christ – bearing the seed of God’s Agape within – will reproduce disciples who have the life-force of Christ within. But this takes time; it takes disciples who are truly abiding in Christ and who are willing to spend quality time mentoring and discipling others while daily denying themselves, taking up their cross, and forsaking all to walk with Christ to bring other disciples into the church who are hungry and thirsty for the presence of Christ within them. **Disciples making disciples** is the Great Commission, not trying to fill the church pews on Sunday mornings with converts who want to live off of a steady diet of milk and cookies fed to them from the pulpit instead of the living bread of Christ’s presence.

### “Christ in you, the hope of glory”

There is so much more that can be taught about this way of Kingdom Discipleship and this life of abiding in Agape that produces the true fruit of the kingdom (Colossians 1:27). But to begin with, a disciple must truly want to follow Jesus Christ on HIS terms. I believe God has been speaking this message to His church through many voices and authors from the beginning. As the days grow shorter until the Lord’s return, the urgency of the Holy Spirit speaking to His people will grow stronger and the call to a life of discipleship will continue to ripple through the church.

“God is a lover through you. He is the kind of a lover that doesn’t need rewards, doesn’t need applause, doesn’t need acclaim, but loves for the sake of loving. This world is crying out, but it doesn’t know

that for which it cries. It cries for an intercessor. It cries for someone who bears the sufferings of Jesus, who is willing to stand in that place, be that light in the darkness, take that rebuff, and be the lamb that is sacrificed. Others will come to the Father someday and say, ‘Thank you for sending Mary, or Bill, or Joe. I learned about You through them.’ That’s the way it works. God had imparted His divine life into your humanity. We are co-sons [and daughters]” Dan Stone

Unfortunately, it has been the case too often, that the call to Kingdom discipleship will be ignored by most because they will be unwilling to pay the price of giving ALL to follow the Master. Others will stumble and fall away, unable to deal with the judgments or persecutions that the strongholds in their heart attract. Still more are so weighed down and entangled in the thorns of materialism and maintaining their worldly lifestyles that they will never reach maturity and fruitfulness that only the pruned branches abiding in Christ can produce.

Finally, the way of Kingdom Discipleship is not one of several options for Christians to choose from. There is no other offer being made. Jesus made it clear to all who want to follow Him that they must follow Him on HIS terms alone or they will never make it until the end. Being a disciple of Jesus is the ONLY way to become all that they were saved for. We who were saved from Egypt (the world), are on the way to becoming fully formed as God’s living temples upon the earth in order that the life within – Christ – has a dwelling place to reign and rule upon this earth. This is God’s plan. It is not about us but is only about what HE is doing on the earth.

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

When the disciple lives truly as they are called to live, then they become God’s living, breathing tabernacle on the earth. That means wherever they go, His presence goes with them. The disciple lives with the understanding that whatever they are doing at any given moment in time, God is with them.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

This is the life we have been saved to live. It carries with it great cost because going where our Master goes means going straight to the cross; there is no other way. But the good news is that because there was life for Him beyond the cross, there is life for us also. And it is a blessed life, but not as the world defines blessings (see Matthew 5:2-12). Abiding in Christ is the only way for the believer to live because Jesus is the only Way to the Father; He is the only Truth that reveals the Father to us, and His Life the only Life that is eternal.

For far too many, the way of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not being taken. This was reflected in the exchange the Christian Missionary, E. Stanley Jones had with Mahatma Gandhi many years ago. Gandhi rejected Christianity not because of who Jesus was or what He taught, but because he saw very little of Jesus' character and life reflected in those who bore the name "Christian." Gandhi's answer to Jones' question about how to make the Christian religion relevant to contemporary India was brilliant and insightful because basically, he stated what should be obvious to all Christians: be and act like Jesus' disciples are supposed to.

The truth that Christians are supposed to be and act like Jesus brings us to ask the question, "Why aren't more Christians becoming like Jesus?" The answer is found in Jesus' teachings like the key parable of "The Sower and the Soils." In that parable, Jesus revealed that it is the conditions of a person's heart that prevents "the seed of the word of the kingdom" from penetrating their heart. Many who start out as believers, never produce the fruit of being like Jesus. Spiritual strongholds and worldly pursuits prevent those who are being called to a life of maturity and fruitfulness in Christ from ever reaching that goal.

The remedies for those poor heart conditions are found in the terms of Kingdom Discipleship that Jesus laid out for all who wanted to follow Him. But the cost is high; the road is narrow, and few enter in because Jesus calls everyone who follows Him to have a supreme love for Him that overshadows every other earthly relationship. He also requires a deliberate choosing of the cross, a life spent following Him, a fervent love for all who belong to Him, an unswerving continuance in His word, and forsaking everything in this world to follow Him.

Not one of those terms of Discipleship is possible for anyone to achieve apart from taking up their cross daily and dying to self. The dying to self is the way of discipleship because God's love for us and in us is the only motivating factor powerful enough to keep the disciple moving down the road towards total transformation into the image and likeness ("Christ in us").

Exactly what we must die to is the self-centered life. Expressed as "The Seven Giants of Self", the need to Look Good, Feel Good, Be Right, Stay in Control, Taking Personal Advantage, Having a Hidden Agenda, and Remaining Undisturbed prevent us from truly abiding in the love of God (Agape). It is in

Abiding that the life of the Vine flows into the branch (the disciple) and as the love, light, and life of the vine flows through the branch it reaches maturity and bears an abundant crop for the King and His kingdom. This is the purpose for pursuing with the whole heart the life of being a Disciple in the kingdom of God. When the believer discovers what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and how they must yield to His Spirit as it flows into the "good soil" of a heart prepared to receive His word, then they are in the right place for the Holy Spirit to bring transformation.

Being a disciple is only the first part of what we have been called to; we have also been called to "go and make disciples." This is the Great Commission: being salt and light to the world as we make disciples. The basic concept of Kingdom Discipleship is "disciples making disciples." As the believer learns how to live as a disciple, they teach others. Those who are more mature in Christ – and who are further along in the process – are the "trailblazers" who teach and train other disciples to follow Christ. **The Great Commission will be fulfilled as we equip, educate, and encourage disciples to go and evangelize the lost.**

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." (John 15:1-4).

In the end, it all comes down to the fact that it is Jesus Christ – in and by the Holy Spirit – who does the actual "making"; all the disciple does is identify those things that obstruct the Lord's work of transformation. We do the Abiding; God does the Making. Discipleship in the kingdom of God is about **Becoming and Making disciples like Jesus**. It is the only way the church will ever fulfill the Great Commission. If we fail at this, we fail at everything we have been called to be and do.

#### QUESTIONS FOR LESSON TWELVE

1. There is much more Jesus has to reveal to His disciples in John chapters 15 – 17 than was covered in this lesson, but some of the key verses for the purposes of this study are in John 15:1-10. Read John 15:1-6, 8. Compare with Matthew 13:18-23. (also Note Matthew 3:10; 7:16-20; 13:6-9; John 15:16, 17; and Philippians 1:9-11). For what purpose were His disciples

called? Was this purpose only for a few chosen disciples, or is it for all those who want to follow Jesus?

2. Review John 15:1-3. What does this passage say about the work of the Father in the life of the disciple? Compare with the key parable found in Matthew 13:1-23. Pay close attention to verse 23. How does pruning relate to the productivity of the branch?
3. Review John 15:1-8. Who is the true vine? What is the relationship between the vine and the branches? How does that affect the ability of the branch to bear fruit?
4. What is the spiritual principle that reveals to us why someone who is not truly a disciple of Christ cannot make disciples?
5. Why are removing the “giants” of the self-life so important to abiding in Christ?



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In 2013 he earned his M.Div. from Andhra Christian Theological College in Hyderabad, India and in that same year was officially ordained into the ministry in a holy convocation administered by Indian pastors representing AG, CSA, and other independent ministries. In 2017 he completed his D.Min. from Covenant Bible College & Seminary, Florida, USA. He and his wife, Deena, now live near Atlanta, GA where he continues to preach, teach, write, and publish his books and study guides.

#### Books Written by Frederick Osborn

1. *Church Planting Movements – India*
2. *Daniel: Kingdoms in Conflict*
3. *Deceived! Overcoming the Age of Mass Deception*
4. *Disciple-to-Disciple: Making Disciples Like Jesus*
5. *Disciple- to-Disciple: Making Disciples Like Jesus, Study Guide*
6. *Exploring the New Testament*
7. *Exploring the Old Testament: Vol. One – The Pentateuch*
8. *Following Christ on the Indian Road: A Missionary’s Story of Discipleship*
9. *From Genesis to Revelation: Interpreting the Book of Revelation Through the Old Testament Scriptures*
10. *Healing Miracles of the Bible*
11. *Jesus Over India: A 52 Week Spiritual Journey Through the Heart of India*
12. *Judges: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Prophetic Commentary*
13. *Keys to Effective Faith: Living by a Faith that Can Move Mountains*
14. *Kingdom Discipleship: Becoming Like Jesus*
15. *Kingdom Discipleship: Becoming a Disciple Like Jesus, Study Guide*
16. *Kingdom Economics*
17. *Living in Dystopia: A Christian Guide Victory in an Orwellian World*

18. *Messiah: The Mission of Jesus of Nazareth*
19. *One Holy Passion: A Daily Devotional Guide for 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting for the 1040 Nations*
20. *Our Jehovah Rapha: A Christ Centered Holistic Approach to Wellness*
21. *Reviving A Nation*
22. *Seven Laws of Dying to Self*
23. *Spiritual Lessons for the Grafted-In*
24. *The Apocalyptic Vision: Understanding the Apocalyptic Writings of the Bible*
25. *The Blood*
26. *The Book of Acts: The Holy Spirit's Handbook for Church Planting Movements*
27. *The Book of Acts: The Holy Spirit's Handbook for Church Planting Movements- Study Guide*
28. *The Gospel of John: Speaking Truth to Power*
29. *The Gospel of Salvation*
30. *The Gospel of Salvation: Study Guide*
31. *The Healthy Heart*
32. *The Holy Spirit in You: Nourishing the Life of Holiness and power in You*
33. *The Keys to Effective Prayer*
34. *The LGBTQI Community and the Church*
35. *The Legacy of Women in the Bible – Study Guide*
36. *The New Reformation: An Assessment of the New Apostolic Reformation from Toronto to Redding*
37. *The Physics of Heaven: The Theology of the New Apostolic Reformation*
38. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: John the Apostle's Heavenly Vision of Christ the King*
39. *The Spirit of Religion*
40. *The Way, the Truth, and the Life: the Teachings and Ministry of Jesus the Messiah*
41. *This Gospel of the Kingdom*
42. *This Gospel of the Kingdom – Study Guide*
43. *To the Heart of the Nations – Prayer Journal*
44. *Twelve Woes*

# Supplemental Handout Materials

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-1

### WHAT WAS JESUS LIKE?

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 3:1–4).

You can’t be conformed to the likeness of Jesus without first discovering the truth about what He was like. Jesus said, “...if you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). Later, Paul would write to the Colossians “...it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (1:19).

A basic study of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John will reveal a portrait of Jesus as a person who possessed a lifestyle characterized by the following attributes:

- Simplicity (He lived unencumbered by possessions)
- Joy (He gave thanks and was content in every circumstance)
- Solitude (He did not need the adoration of the multitudes and often sought time alone to commune with His Father)
- Humility (He gave His Father glory in everything)
- Creativity (His creative use of the parables is an example of His imagination)
- Chastity (Jesus was a model of chaste lifestyle. Chastity means much, much more than “abstaining from unlawful sexual intercourse,” it means “purity in conduct and intention; restraint or simplicity in design and expression; “having personal integrity”)
- Community (He interacted with others – like His disciples; He fully participated in the Jewish life; Jesus was not “too spiritual” to spend time with children. He did not attempt to separate Himself from the world, but sat with rich or poor, and saint or sinner)
- Compassionate and Passionate (Jesus was the perfect expression of agape: pure, divine love in action; He was not emotionally disconnected from the pain and suffering of others)
- Service (As the Son of Man, He lived to do His Father’s will and He lived to put others ahead of Himself)
- Peace (Jesus was a peace with God and within Himself – even in the eye of the storm)
- Prayer (Jesus prayed in every circumstance)
- Real (Jesus Practiced what he preached and there was no hypocrisy in Him. He was the same person in private as He was in public)
- Forgave (above all else, no matter what, Jesus forgave others)
- Hope (In the end, He came to give us hope for abundant life in this world and eternal life in the world to come)
- All of the above adds up to mean that Jesus was truly, Emmanuel “God with us.”

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-2

### The Parables of Jesus

#### I. Teaching Parables

##### A. About the Kingdom of God

1. The Soils (Matthew 13:3–8; Mark 4:3–8; Luke 8:5–8)
2. The Weeds (Matthew 13:24–30)
3. The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31, 32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18, 19)
4. The Yeast (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20, 21)
5. The Treasure (Matthew 13:44)
6. The Pearl (Matthew 13:45, 46)
7. The Fishing Net (Matthew 13:47–50)
8. The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26–29)

##### B. About Service and Obedience

1. The Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16)
2. The Loaned Money (Matthew 25:14–30)
3. The Nobleman’s Servants (Luke 19:11–27)
4. The Servant’s Role (Luke 17:7–10)

##### C. About Prayer

1. The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–8)
2. The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8)

##### D. About Neighbors Luke 10:30–37

##### E. About Humility

1. The Wedding Feast (Luke 14:7–11)
2. The Proud Pharisee and the Corrupt Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14)

##### F. About Wealth

1. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:16–21)
2. The Great Feast (Luke 14:16–24)
3. The Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1–9)

#### II. Gospel Parables

##### A. About God’s Love

1. The Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12–14; Luke 15:3–7)
2. The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10)
3. The Lost Son (Luke 15:11–32)

##### B. About Thankfulness Luke 7:41–43

1. The Forgiven Debts (Luke 7:41–43)

### III. Parables of Judgment and the Future

- A. About Christ's Return
  1. The Ten Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1–13)
  2. The Faithful and Sensible Servants (Matthew 24:45–51; Luke 12:42–48)
  3. The Traveling Homeowner (Mark 13:34–37)
- B. About God's Values
  1. The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28–32)
  2. The Evil Farmers (Matthew 21:33–41; Mark 12:1–9; Luke 20:9–16)
  3. The Unproductive Fig Tree (Luke 13:6–9)
  4. The Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14)
  5. The Unforgiving Debtor (Matthew 18:23–35)

Life Application Bible Notes. (2007). (pp. 1807–1808). Tyndale.

### HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-3

#### FIVE WARNING PASSAGES FOR “STONY HEARTS” FOUND IN HEBREWS

1. Hebrews 2:1-14 “Do not ignore so great a salvation”
2. Hebrews 3:7 – 4:7/16 “Do not be like Israel in the wilderness and come short of God’s promised rest”
3. Hebrews 5:1 – 6:21 “Do not turn against God and fall away after already having repented and received the blessings of God’s salvation”
4. Hebrews 10:19-39 “Do not sin willfully and head in the direction that leads to eternal destruction”
5. Hebrews 12:15-29 “Do not fall short of the grace of God, refusing Him who speaks”

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-3

### DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

After studying the ten points above, it might be tempting to adopt the idea that discipleship is about conforming to a set of behaviors that will produce a reformed lifestyle in alignment with the teachings of Jesus. In the book, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*, the authors pointed to some key deficiencies in the way modern church leaders attempt to make disciples. The first mistaken notion they pointed to was the idea that discipleship is all about the transfer of information; that the leader substitutes knowledge about Jesus for the true purpose of getting to know Him intimately. “Another faulty view of discipleship that plagues many churches is approaching discipleship as behavior modification. If you are a leader with this predisposition, you think the solution to a discipleship deficiency is teaching people to live ‘better.’ If you tend to focus on behavior, remember that Jesus has always focused on the heart.” Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*, B&H Publishing and LifeWay Research, © 2012, p.25.

The key to understanding Jesus’ major teachings in the Sermon on the Mount is the fact that in every case, Jesus was most concerned with the inward attitude of the disciple’s heart and not just outward performance. Jesus’ teachings on the Law far exceed the demands of the scribes and the Pharisees: “you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). He demonstrated that the righteousness the Law called for was of a very different nature than the righteousness exhibited by Judaism’s religious elite (Matthew 5:20). Jesus rightly taught the Mosaic Law: that its regulations and basic principles were intended to reveal God’s moral character and inspire men to be like Him. The Law was not given to bring salvation, but was given to drive men back into a right relationship with God where an inner transformation – which only God can work – can take place.

Therefore, in the Kingdom of God the issue in the Old Testament law of murder was not so much the act of violence as the anger that led to it. The issue was not where, when or how to make an offering, but was how to bring reconciliation between men and God. The issue was not so much the act of adultery as the lust that led a husband astray or causes men to treat women as sex objects rather than persons. The issue in the law of divorce was not when it was permissible, but was one of loyalty and commitment to the marriage covenant under God. The issue in the law concerning oaths was not when an oath might be broken, but was the essential integrity and honesty of the individual making the vow before God and men. The issue in the “eye for an eye” principle was not the right of the individual to receive equal compensation for an injury, but the unrighteous demand for revenge when forgiveness is called for. In the kingdom of heaven the call to love one’s neighbor does not permit someone to hate anyone outside of the kingdom. All of Jesus’ teachings on Old Testament law can best be summed up in His answer to the scribe who asked him which is the greatest commandment of the law: “*And he said to him. ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all you soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 22:37-40).

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-3

### THREE HUMAN RESPONSES TO SIN

**ONE – Revel:** to take great pleasure or delight (in); to make merry; indulge in boisterous festivities; boisterous merrymaking or festivity

**TWO – Refusal:** is a denial to acknowledge or admit to sin in general or in one’s own personal sin. Also, the idea that one’s own good deeds outweigh the bad, making bad deeds acceptable. Blame shift: it is always somebody else’s fault; “a victim of circumstances,” refusals to admit one’s own culpability for sin and its consequences.

**THREE – Run Away:** is the desire to escape from the consequences of sin. Mentally: drugs, mindless entertainment and escape into fantasy. Running away is usually done **Emotionally** by being withdrawn, uncaring, callous, and uncommitted; or **Physically** – instead of facing up to and admitting to sinful behavior, and then working to compensate those harmed by that behavior, physically move away from bad circumstances to escape the consequences for actions (i.e. the “gypsy” lifestyle; a pattern of divorces, broken relationships, bankruptcies, career changes, etc.)

### GOD’S remedy for human sin is:

**REPENT** – “Against you and you only I have sinned” I deserve death: face up to and admit sins... seek wherever possible to restore, or compensate those harmed.

**RECEIVE FORGIVENESS** – By the blood of Jesus shed on the cross the atonement for the sins of all people was made (John 3:16). This includes forgiving yourself and forgiving others... That is being reconciled to God, to others, and to self

**RESURRECTION** – To be raised again into the new life in eternity. God does not make “bad people good” but makes those who are dead in their trespasses and sins alive in Christ – in this life and in the life to come.

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-4

“... are we bringing everything we have to him with this attitude of stewardship; this understanding that we now live, and use everything we have, with the desire for his glory? Everything must be submitted to his Lordship. ‘Jesus is Lord’ was the simple but utterly radical first Christian creed.” Peter Maiden

### DISCIPLES HONOR THE LORD WITH THEIR WEALTH

“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.” Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV)

The principle set forth here is a consistent theme throughout the Scriptures: God blesses those who put their trust in Him and who honor Him by the way they use what He has entrusted into their hands. Those who obey His truth and wisdom will prosper materially and most importantly spiritually, but those who think that prosperity is for them to use as they please will miss the blessings of the kingdom. Yes, there are many people who are prosperous by the world’s standards and may have the wealth of a Solomon, but if they are seen with spiritual eyes, they will be exposed as paupers by the eternal standards of the kingdom. Removing the thorns from their hearts allows disciples of Jesus Christ to see the truth and not be deceived and become entangled by the deceitfulness of a materialistic lifestyle. There are three practical guidelines found in the Bible that will enable the disciple to live “thorn free” and Honor the Lord with their wealth as He intends. (I write in more detail on this subject in my book *Kingdom Economics 2* available on amazon.com).

**THE FIRST BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF MONEY: *Money and the wisdom to gain it is a blessing from God.***

Read Proverbs 3:9-10 again and note how it expresses this first biblical principle of money.

The first step to removing the thorns from the heart is for the disciple to recognize that money and the wisdom to gain it is a blessing from God. Job 12:13 (NIV) says, “To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his.” That means everything the disciple has, everything they invest, everything they earn in their lifetime comes from this earth, which ultimately belongs to the Lord, who is the Creator of all things. Psalms 24:1-2 NIV expresses this principle: acknowledging God as the source of all wisdom and wealth causes the disciple to seek out godly counsel in how GOD’S money is to be used to advance HIS kingdom, not our own personal empires.

**THE SECOND BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF MONEY: *Giving to help others pleases God and causes Him to release even more prosperity into the hands of the giver.***

Why does God prosper His people? Is it so they can become selfish, wasteful, and self-indulgent? Genesis 12:1-3 gives a clue as to why God blesses the faithful. When the Lord chose Abraham and promised him, “I will bless you; I will make your name great,” He added, “and you

will be a blessing.” To the worldly wise, giving away money as a means to prosperity seems like nonsense. However, from the kingdom perspective, giving to help others pleases God and causes Him to release even more prosperity into the hands of the giver.

“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.” Proverbs 14:31 (NIV)

“One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” Proverbs 11:24-25 (NIV)

The logic of giving as part of wealth-building is only discovered by knowing and understanding God’s heart for the poor and needy. God is deeply concerned for the poor and needy. It is His desire for His people to be generous and give to those less fortunate. Few things anger the Lord more than those who mistreat the poor and who are unjust to the powerless. Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 3:27-28; 28:27; 21:13; 22:22-23; and 14:21; 19:17 teach us that it is God’s desire for His people to given to the poor and needy. And in fact God specifically blesses His people so they can help others less fortunate than themselves. It is the responsibility of those who have the gifts and talents for making money to help those whose circumstances are not as fortunate.

Be Careful! Giving to the needy just so you can get a return from God misses the entire principle. Giving-to-get is not true kingdom giving: giving freely from a heart fully released from the thorny soil of the deceitfulness of riches means giving without any expectation of return (Luke 6:35). The disciple gives out of pure motives: because he or she loves their neighbor as themselves, they will be distressed to see them in hungry or without clothes.

**THE THIRD BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF MONEY: *2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NIV) “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*** Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Once again we see in the Scriptures the reverse logic of the counsel that the worldly financial advisors would give. So giving generously to help others – even in our poverty – may seem to be making us poorer, but by becoming poorer in this way, we will be like Jesus and discover great wealth – a wealth that may not necessarily be measured by our bank accounts or investment portfolios – but will enrich our life none-the-less. Luke 6:38 and Matthew 6:1-4 mean the giving of Jesus’ disciples will differ from the giving of those of this world.

“The principle of the consumer age is: if you have it, spend it. The discipleship principle is, if you have it, it is a gift from God, a gift to enjoy, but the only way you will truly enjoy the gift is to give it back. If he is the Lord of my life, then everything I have is his.” Peter Maiden

In everything concerning giving, the disciple’s heart is to bless others spiritually or physically – this is the true meaning of selfless giving. The disciple gives without any motivation for earthly rewards or the praise of men, and God blesses that disciple with even more so they can give more. So here we discover the purpose of money in the kingdom of God that is lost on the

worldly wise. Only when someone fully obeys the true purpose for which God blesses His people, and uses that wealth in accordance with God's commands will they prosper.

It is not only our material wealth we are commanded to share liberally with others, but more importantly we are to share the Word. Preaching the “good news” of the kingdom is as great if not a greater commandment as giving someone the coat off of your back. Psalms 40:9, 10; Isaiah 61:1-3; Matthew 4:23; 24:14; Acts 5:42; 8:4; 10:42; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; and Revelation 4:6 reveal the great importance of preaching the gospel.

Spiritually, disciples are commanded to liberally sow the Word of the Kingdom to those who have not yet received it. Those who have received the spiritual blessings of the kingdom are given a mandate to share those blessings with others: 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 NIV “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Proverbs 3:27 says, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so.” The mandate to share the blessings of the kingdom includes the material blessings we have been given. So disciples must take care of those less fortunate than they are (not hoarding or consuming in excess for themselves). When they obey the Lord, God is then free to unleash the windows of heaven and pour out His blessings upon them – He knows He can trust His faithful servants with more. Jesus said in the Parable of the Talents: Luke 19:26 NKJV “For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”

“While caring for the poor is not the basis of our salvation, this does not mean that our use of wealth is totally disconnected from our salvation. Indeed, caring for the poor (among other things) is evidence of our salvation. The faith in Christ that saves us from our sins involves an internal transformation that has external implications.” David Platt

The foundational principle of giving – if you give little, you will get little in return – is expressed in 2 Corinthians. The example Paul used of the farmer who plants just a few seeds and will get only a small crop, but if he plants much, he will reap much, parallels Jesus' teachings in His parables of the kingdom. The idea in 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 is that the person who gives is enriched through his giving. But turning back to the wisdom of Proverbs, it should be understood that when the Bible speaks of material wealth building, it still requires wisdom and diligence on the part of the individual investor. It is foolish to believe that the “sowing” of finances into the church or to help the helpless is a guarantee of unending prosperity of mathematical multiplication – 10... 60... or 100-fold dollars for every dollar given. The kingdom of God is not some cosmic slot machine where the faithful put in coins until it spits out a jackpot into their laps. That kind of thinking will certainly lead to poverty, and will in the end ruin the faith of the believer in God's prosperity. Building wealth and gaining prosperity not only requires God's provision and protection, but also requires hard work and sound investing on the part of the faithful.

“The truth that we incarnate Jesus when we serve others destroys the common distinction between ‘spiritual work’ (praying, preaching, teaching) and other kinds of service (nursing the sick, feeding the hungry). It means that when members of our community help provide clothing to the poor people in our area, God is mystically there in our midst, smiling upon that simple act of charity.” John Michael Talbot

Read carefully verse 11 of 2 Corinthians 9; there are two reasons why God blesses those who give. First, so as they give, God will bless them with even more; and second, when they take their gifts to those who need them, those who are in need will break out into thanksgiving and praise to God for helping them. Therefore, when disciples free themselves from the entanglements of acquiring and holding on to material possessions, they can give generously with confidence that God will enrich those who give. This third biblical principle of money – that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously – also means that God will continue to bless His disciples in order for them to continue to give generously. And their generosity not only helps them needy, but those who receive will overflow with thanks to God – therefore, God always gets the glory when Christians give. That God gets the glory reveals the ultimate purpose for money: that because of the service of His disciples, the kingdom of God will be advanced in the hearts of men and women as they give thanks and praise to God.

*“And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’”* Luke 21:1-4

When we read passages like Luke 21:1-4 and Mark 9:41 we see that God does not judge the value of the gift by its size, but in proportion to the ability of the giver. Some may only be able to give a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, but they will by no means lose their heavenly reward.

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-5

### “Kingdom Discipleship Illustrated in Peter’s Story”

A quick study of the Master Jesus with His disciple Peter illustrates this principle of kingdom discipleship. As we follow Peter’s story in the Gospels and Acts the process of kingdom discipleship is revealed.

- Peter’s life as a disciple of Jesus begins with his calling:

*“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him.”* Matthew 4:18-20

- Once he begins to follow Jesus, Peter (along with the other disciples) goes wherever the Master goes. Peter eats what the Master eats, and sleeps where the Master sleeps. Everything he sees his Master Jesus doing, Peter wants to do. *“Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Explain this parable to us.’”* Matthew 15:15 and the Master begins to pour His teachings into His disciple Peter.
- The longer Peter follows Jesus, the more his Master teaches him. *“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’”* Matthew 16:15-19. The longer Peter follows Jesus, the more revelation comes to him. Spiritual transformation is taking place in Peter’s mind.
- *“Then Peter began to say to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You.’”* Mark 10:28 reveals that Peter recognized the great cost of following Jesus. Kingdom discipleship offers nothing less than giving all that you have and all that you are in service to the Master. There can be no holding on to the things of this world and no looking back; to be a disciple of Jesus means we give everything to Him. And not just the bad stuff we don’t want any more, but also the good, including our hopes and dreams for the future. ALL has to be placed in the Master’s hand.

Those who follow Jesus only for what they think they will get out of it will never become true disciples of His. If they follow Jesus for the big house, fast cars, money in the bank... or for the miracles, signs, healings, etc. they will be sadly disappointed in the end because they will hear the Master say, “Depart from Me because you were never truly disciples of mine.” (Matthew 7:21-23)

- Peter becomes part of the “inner circle” of disciples that Jesus takes with Him everywhere He goes. Peter was with Jesus when He was transfigured and His glorified

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state was revealed (Matthew 17:1-8). Peter was also one of the disciples Jesus permitted to go into the room when He raised the little girl from death (Luke 8:51-56). These incidents were special teaching moments for these disciples intended to prepare them to become like the Master in every way.

- After the Master’s resurrection, Peter was one of the first disciples to see Jesus (Luke 24:33-34; note also 1 Corinthians 15:5). Peter also had a very special interaction with Jesus after His resurrection (John 21:15-19). Peter had failed Jesus in a dramatic way (all the disciples deserted Him in the end, but only Peter stood in front of the rest and said He would follow Jesus to the death). Disciples are not perfect human beings, and we often fail our Master, but He is faithful and true to restore all those who come to Him willingly with a broken heart. An important part of this story from John is that Jesus is not only restoring Peter after his fall, but He is also preparing Peter for stepping into the role of being a disciple making disciples. Three times Jesus instructs Peter: “Feed My lambs...” “Tend My sheep...” “Feed My sheep...” And then reveals to Peter that his life is no longer his own, but he must now follow his Master until the end.
- In Acts 1:12-15 we see that after Jesus’ Ascension, Peter has become one of the leaders of the small band of disciples. His name is mentioned first, and he takes the lead for choosing a replacement for the treacherous, Judas Iscariot. In Acts 2, it is Peter who steps forward and delivers the all-important message on the day of Pentecost. In the first few chapters of Acts, Peter is clearly established as one of the leaders of the church.
- In Acts 9:39-42 we see how Peter’s life is becoming more and more like his Master’s life: *“Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.”* Peter is now talking and acting just like the Master.

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## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-5 WHAT IS DOMINION THEOLOGY?

### From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:

Dominion theology, also known as *dominionism*, is a group of Christian political ideologies that seek to institute a nation that is governed by Christians and based on their understandings of biblical law. Extents of rule and ways of acquiring governing authority are varied. For example, dominion theology can include theonomy but does not necessarily involve advocacy of adherence to the Mosaic Law as the basis of government. The label is primarily applied to groups of Christians in the United States.

Prominent adherents of those ideologies include Calvinist Christian reconstructionism, Charismatic and Pentecostal Kingdom Now theology, and the New Apostolic Reformation. Most of the contemporary movements that are labeled dominion theology arose in the 1970s from religious movements asserting aspects of Christian nationalism. Roman Catholic integralism is also sometimes considered to fall under the dominionist umbrella, but the Catholic integralist movement is much older and theologically markedly different from Protestant dominionism since it is tied to the doctrine of the Catholic Church as being the only true church.

### JOHN MACARTHUR ON DOMINION THEOLOGY:

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/70-9/bible-questions-and-answers-part-37>

Another question, what is dominion theology? Have you heard about that? Dominion theology. That's a new label for a new kind of theology, and they're always new theologies. Dominion theology comes in a lot of forms, but I think what you're probably talking about is John Wimber, who is now advocating a new kind of dominion. Let me give you this very simply. Okay? Dominion theology, espoused primarily by John Wimber, who is networked through a group of churches called The Vineyard churches, but basically what he is saying is that as believers we are to take power over Satan and demons. We are to exercise dominion over them.

There is another kind of theology that's existing today, it's called Liberation Theology. It is a form of theology that says that the church is to take dominion over the institutions of the world. That's another form of dominion theology or kingdom theology. And what it basically says is that the church's mandate is to take over the institutions of the world. That's the liberation theology side. And what dominion theology says is that we are to take over the powers of darkness. We are to take over the demons and we are to take over the spirits and we are to dominate Satan. We are to take dominion. And that's why they talk about power evangelism. It talks about power healing.

In other words, he trains people supposedly to invade the satanic world and take dominion over demons. That we as Christians by living in the natural world and by just moving around in the visible world have failed to exercise the power that we have to literally take over the satanic world. You hear them talk about binding Satan. Have you heard that? Binding demons, pleading

the blood on demons, pleading the blood on Satan, taking dominion over not only demons but all of the institutions of the world that are infiltrated and influenced by demons. And they believe that whatever people's problems are tend to be demon induced and it gets extreme. No matter what it is, it's a demon and you have to take dominion over these demons. And that is why they talk about power evangelism. They say you cannot evangelize without signs and wonders. You have to overpower the demonic world and demonstrate your divine power to the lost in order for them to be saved. Power healing – break the bondage of demons and so forth.

It is unbiblical. We are never told – never told to take dominion over demons. We are told by James, “Resist the devil and he will” – what? – “flee from you.” We are never told to bind Satan. We are never told to bind demons. We are never told to plead the blood on Satan or demons. Listen to Jude 9, “Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil, argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against the devil a judgment but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you.’” Even Michael who is super angel did not dare rebuke Satan but rather said, “Lord, You take care of him.” And if Michael as a holy angel does not take to himself the exercise of authority over fallen angels, where would we find a mandate to do that? The Bible simply tells us that if you want to deal with the enemy, you put on the whole armor of God. Right? You put on the whole armor of God and you'll be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

We are not called to take dominion over the institutions of this world. We are not called to take dominion over demons and over the devil. We are called to get on our spiritual armor, to resist that demonic world, and trust in the power of God who does take care of them.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY:

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May 2009  
What is Dominion Theology? What is Dominion Theology?  
Thomas D. Ice Liberty University, [tdice@liberty.edu](mailto:tdice@liberty.edu)  
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## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-6

### COUNT THE COST AND FOLLOW CHRIST

By Billy Graham, June 1, 2020

<https://decisionmagazine.com/billy-graham-count-the-cost-and-follow-christ/>

God is to be first and foremost in our lives at all times, even above your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, or even your life. Christ is to be first. And He said if you're not willing to make that decision, and not willing to make that choice, you cannot follow Him. "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish?'" (Luke 14:27-30).

In other words, Jesus is saying, "If you're going to follow Me, sit down and count the cost."

On this occasion, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. He was on His way to Jerusalem to die on the cross for our sins.

One mistake the older generation has made is that we haven't clearly presented to the younger generation what it costs to follow Christ, and the joy and the thrill and the excitement of following Christ and knowing Him and having your sins forgiven. What a message we have to give!

And we find it difficult to understand the lack of commitment today. That's really what I find among many people—they really haven't committed themselves to any philosophy or ideology or religious faith. They're just hanging loose, sort of waiting for a wind to come along and blow them in any direction. I'm asking you to commit yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Count the cost. Surrender it all to Him. Let Him be your Lord.

And what I would beg of you most of all is get to know the Bible. Whatever your vocation, get a knowledge of the Bible first.

"Christ demands first place in everything. And you have to come to Christ realizing you'll have to pay a price."

There are three problems that people face when it comes to the Word of God. First, there's an intellectual problem. The intellectual problem that I faced when I was in school is one that many of you face. I had to decide who Jesus Christ is. Is He the Son of the living God, the way, the truth and the life? Is He the embodiment of all truth—scientific truth, psychological truth, moral truth, spiritual truth—as He claims? Or is He a liar who deserves to be put in a mental institution? Which is He? That's the decision that you have to make.

The Bible has a lot to say about the mind: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). The mind is important. But remember that the mind has been affected by sin. And you cannot come to Jesus Christ intellectually alone. The last step has to be taken by faith. And so by faith I say, "Lord Jesus, I believe You are who You claim to be, the Son of the living God, the Creator of the universe, who died on the cross for my sins and rose again for my justification. I believe You're coming back to set up Your Kingdom. I want You to be my Savior, and by faith I accept You." When you do that, He changes your life and comes into your heart and makes you a new person.

The second problem that people face in coming to Christ is a moral problem—meeting the high standards of Christ. Because, you see, Christ demands first place in everything. And you have to come to Christ realizing you'll have to pay a price. You can't drag those dirty sins with you. You'll have to quit your lying. You'll have to quit sleeping with that person who is not your spouse. You'll have to quit cheating in school. You'll have to take some responsibility and work.

All of these things are costly. Are you willing to pay them? That's the moral problem. His standards are very high, and He doesn't change to accommodate Himself to our generation and its changing, permissive standards. He's the same yesterday, today and forever.

I don't believe you can keep His standards without Christ. Sex is thrown at you from every angle. Peer pressure. You can't live a clean life today, except with Christ in your heart. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The Scripture says, "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14). There was a time when sin ruled in your life. But when you come to Christ, sin no longer rules. Christ rules.

You're not going to become perfect. Suppose you accept Christ and you slip and fall; what then? Immediately, if you really know Christ, you will get on your knees and say, "O Lord, I'm sorry. Forgive me. I turn from that sin. I don't ever want to commit it again." You confess it, acknowledge it. And He's faithful and just to forgive you your sin (see 1 John 1:9). So if you've sinned, come back to Him and say, "Lord, I have sinned. I'm sorry. I surrender."

And then there's the emotional problem. Because, you see, we're made of mind and will and emotion. He wants Lordship over your career, your marriage, your friendships, your morals—everything is to be surrendered to Him.

"God is looking for nurses and doctors and business people, and—yes, Christian politicians and Christian leaders—who are ready to step out and pay the price and serve Christ."

Nobody says you have to cry when you come to Christ, or you have to laugh when you come to Christ. But I'll tell you this. You can't look at that cross very long and realize its deep significance without being moved that God would send His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to shed His blood and die for you so that you might have forgiveness of sin and eternal life, and know that you're going to Heaven.

Now, God makes three calls to you. First, He calls you to the person of Jesus Christ. “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’” (Isaiah 1:18). They can be made white as snow because of the cross. So He calls you to Christ tonight. It’s not a church call, it’s not a family call, it’s not a national call. It’s a call to the person of Christ.

Second, God calls you to consecration. The word *consecration* means to set apart. We do the dedicating, but only God can consecrate. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God”

(Romans 12:1). Think of your life as a house. You’re the owner of the house. You have a ring of keys. And when you respond to the call of Christ, you give God the key to the front door of your house. You commit your life to Christ as Savior and Lord. And when you respond to God’s call to consecration, you take off the other keys from the ring and give them to God. For a mother or a father, it means that you go to the nursery and give your baby to Christ. For a student, it means that you give God the key to your education.

For a business person, it means that you give God the key to your business. You give God the key to your romance. You give God the key to your future marriage. He becomes Lord.

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Colossians 2:6). How do you receive Christ? You receive Him by faith. Now walk according to faith. Give Him all of the keys on that key ring.

And then, third, God calls you to training. I’ll tell you, I wish we had a million young people right now who would say, “I’ll go where You want me to go and be what You want me to be, Lord.” God is looking for nurses and doctors and business people, and—yes, Christian politicians and Christian leaders—who are ready to step out and pay the price and serve Christ.

I’m calling you to join His army. March with Him under the banner of the cross, with His love in your heart. But first you’ll have to take that first step, and say, “Yes, by faith I receive You, Lord, into my heart.”

I’m going to ask you to do it right now. Say, “I receive Christ. I want to follow Christ. I want to give Him all the keys in my ring—no matter what the cost. I’m willing to pay the price tonight, whatever it is.”

Don’t let this chance escape. The Bible says, “He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1). You may never have another moment in all your life when you’re so close to the Kingdom as you are right now. This is your moment and your hour. ©1979 BGEA

*Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version.*

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-7

### WHAT ARE THE FOUR TYPES OF LOVES?

By: Heather Adams, Updated February 03, 2023

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-are-the-four-types-of-loves.html>

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

God planted within each one of us the need to love and be loved. It is one of the ways He made us in His image. Through a relationship with our Heavenly Father, we experience His deep and abiding love. And He designed us to both receive that wondrous affection and share it with those in our lives.

Scripture provides many examples of how we can express devotion to each other. One Christian writer found four words in particular, from ancient Greek, that capture the essence of several types of love we are capable of showing. They vary in degree of intimacy and intensity, but all are meant to encourage and edify. What Are the Four Loves?

The phrase “The Four Loves” came from the title of a 1960 book penned by C.S. Lewis. Based on a set of radio talks he’d done two years earlier, the book presents and then explores the notion that humans are able to feel different kinds of love, depending on the situations and relationships involved.

He used translations from ancient Greek, because he knew that language had a large range of words to define what love can mean. The four he chose were:

Storge  
Phileo  
Eros  
Agape

Lewis makes the point that all of them can, and often do, intertwine. And, he adds that they are displayed to others at their deepest and most meaningful level when they grow out of a love for God first.

### 1. Storge Love “Familial Affection”

This is the type of care that exists between family members, friends, or companions. Longer-lasting, it goes beyond an initial infatuation or attraction. Built on a familiarity between people, the emphasis of storge is on devotion and intimacy that develops over time.

Real-life examples include parents toward children, siblings, spouses, and sometimes very close friendships. One of the 10 commandments shows what storge love can look like:

*“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12).

The Apostle Paul reminded spouses of God’s order to seek and show it as well.

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”* (Ephesians 5:25).

### 2. Phileo Love “Friendship”

Phileo most often describes a relationship between people, one of generous warmth for another. But in a broader sense, it can also apply to churches and even cities. The basis of this common bond is shared beliefs, values or interests.

An image that comes to mind as an example of this is good friends who look out for each other. But many churches and towns have what they call “sister” congregations or cities.

*“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves”* (Romans 12:10).

*“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters”* (Hebrews 13:1).

### 3. Eros Love “Passion”

This kind of affection is meant to describe a healthy, sensual love between husbands and wives. Romance and physical attraction play a part in it. God gave us this kind of desire with the clear instruction to express it only within the bonds of marriage.

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*“I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine...”* (Song of Solomon 6:3).

Scripture clearly tells us that He cares about what we do with our bodies. Believers are cautioned to avoid showing Eros love to anyone but our spouse, so that the choices we make honor God.

*“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies”* (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

### 4. Agape Love “Charity”

Agape love is probably the most talked about of the four kinds of love. It is the highest, most complete form of affection. God’s love for us is the foundation of this love. And Jesus gave us many lessons about and examples of agape - a strong, selfless and sacrificial love - during His earthly ministry.

The early church actually used the term to describe two separate activities they practiced. One was a sacred rite with bread and wine, similar to the Eucharist today. The other was a regular fellowship meal they held, to which the local poor were invited.

Jesus reminded His disciples over and over again that we are called to show this agape to God and to other people, whether they are friends or enemies.

*“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”* (Matthew 22:37-39).

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven’”* (Matthew 5:43-46).

### Are the Four Love Types Biblical?

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The Four Love terms that C.S. Lewis explored are not named specifically as such in Scripture. But all through God’s Word we can find people who demonstrated each of them.

### Storge

- Noah and his family (Genesis 6-9)
- The siblings Mary, Martha and Lazarus of Bethany (Luke 10; John 11)

### Phileo

- David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18)
- Paul and Timothy (Acts 16:1-3; Acts 17:14-15)

### Eros

- Part of a father’s instruction to his son (Proverbs 5:18-20)
- The King and his bride (Song of Solomon)

### Agape

- Between God and us (John 3:16; Romans 8:38-39)
- Between us and the Lord (John 13:34-35)
- Between us and others (1 John 3:16)

In *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis explores the nature of love. He starts with the Biblical truth that God is love, and sets out to see how our lives can reflect the different aspects of that. In his book, Lewis wrote: “Affection is responsible for nine-tenths of whatever solid and durable happiness there is in our natural lives.”

He also talks of a maturing process we will ideally go through. First, we make the choice to show love, especially storge and phileo, to others. As we do, our hearts will align more closely with God’s.

As we become more giving in our spirits over time, more of the selfless agape love will naturally pour out of us. And that will lead to blessings for others, and for us. It is a wonderful cycle that can change the world for the better.

*“Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man”* (Proverbs 3:3-4).

*“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins”* (1 Peter 4:8).

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-8

### Living to Die

John 10:14–16

Everything about Jesus’ life pointed toward a purpose. His passing through the world illustrated many spiritual truths about God and his plan, but Jesus’ main reason for coming was to die in our behalf. Without Christ’s death for us there would be no hope for us!

Reference	Passage
Romans 5:8	But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.
Ephesians 5:2	Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him.
Hebrews 9:14	Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our hearts from deeds that lead to death so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.
1 Peter 2:24	He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds!
1 Peter 3:18	Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, N., & Taylor, L. (2001). *Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts & Maps* (pp. 338–339). Tyndale House Publishers.

## HANDOUT

## DISCIPLESHIP 102-9

**The Solution to Self-Centeredness**By: **Steve Sabol**, March 29, 2021<https://lifewaychurch.life/the-solution-to-self-centeredness/>

Most of us would agree that we have become a very self-conscious and self-centered society. The baby boom generation, of which I am a member, has been labeled, “The Me Generation.” Generations that have followed us have seemingly grown progressively worse in the area of over-emphasizing self. We are preoccupied with ourselves. We shouldn’t be surprised. The Bible told us to expect this to happen in the last days...

2 Timothy 3:1-2 (LB) “... In the last days it is going to be very difficult to be Christian. For people will love only themselves and their money.”

As we begin this blog, let’s look at some of the **EXPRESSIONS OF A SELF-CENTERED CULTURE**. There are basically three forms of self-expression in our culture:

### 1. Individualism | “*Others* don’t matter!”

“I’ve got to do what’s best for me.” The motto is “Do Your Own Thing”. The theme song is Frank Sinatra’s megahit, “I Did It My Way.”

Have you noticed that many of the people in our society are becoming more and more inconsiderate and rude? What’s causing that? Among other things, **individualism**. As the wise man Solomon said, “An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends” (Proverbs. 18:1).

### 2. Secularism | “*God* doesn’t matter!”

Most people believe *in* God, they just think He’s *irrelevant*. They’re just not that interested in Him. They ignore Him. They don’t need God – that is, until they do.

It’s kind of like what Job said in chapter 21, verse fourteen: “The wicked tell God to leave them alone. They don’t want to know His will for their lives.” It’s like, “God, You stay on Your side of the fence and I’ll stay on mine. You don’t bother me, and I won’t bother You. You handle the world, I’ll handle my own life.”

King David said in Psalm 10:4, “A wicked man, in his pride, thinks that God doesn’t matter.” Can we become so full of ourselves that we don’t have room for God? The answer is yes. The problem with a self-made man is that he often ends up worshiping his maker, and he lives for himself.

### 3. Narcissism | “*I’m* all that matters!”

Narcissism is an epidemic in our country! All that many people are interested in these days is *their* goals, *their* dreams, *their* desires, *their* fulfillment, *their* happiness, and *their* careers. Everything is evaluated by the question, “What’s in it for me?”

I have become sensitive to the narcissism of these days to the point where themes in certain commercials and ads start to bother me. Like the Twix ad that says, “Two for me none, for you,” or the Reebok ad that admonishes men to, “Cheat on your girlfriend, not your workout.” I once saw an ad for plastic surgery that encouraged people to “reduce certain parts of your body, enlarge other parts ... you’re worth it!” All that matters is me.

The devastating effects of these “isms” are disintegrating families, superficial relationships, frustration and despair. Superficial relationships are a result of having no time for closeness. People are too busy with their own goals. They can’t afford to let a relationship interfere with *their* career, *their* plans or goals. And the sad result is many lonely people.

If you place yourself at the center of your universe, pretty soon your world becomes very small and meaningless. Self-centeredness never satisfies. It leaves a bitter taste in your mouth – an aftertaste. There’s more to life than just you. If you make *you* the center, if you make *yourself* a little god, you’ll quickly realize life is meaningless. Like Proverbs 28:25 says, “Selfishness only causes trouble.”

If all that’s true, and *I* believe that it is, then what’s **THE SOLUTION TO SELF-CENTEREDNESS**. There are three antidotes that have worked for me over the years:

### 1. BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS.

Get interested in other people. Cultivate some friendships. Join a Life Group! You need other people to give you balance so that you’re not so self-centered. You need to make time for relationships for your own psychological health, and your own spiritual health. The apostle Paul wisely said, “In God’s plan men and women need each other” (I Corinthians 11:11).

Caring about somebody else is the fastest way to get your focus off yourself. Build some relationships. One of the purposes of the church is to build relationships so you’re not selfish. It’s called community. I believe that one of the antidotes you need in a selfish society is a church family, a place where you can belong and become and be what God wants you to be.

Doing “church” through the television or *only* online can make for passive people. It’s too easy. There’s no interaction with anybody else. It requires no involvement, no commitment. You don’t have to interact with anybody. **We need in-person community.**

### 2. GIVE YOURSELF AWAY.

Give yourself away through some kind of service. I’m convinced that to be spiritually and emotionally healthy and balanced, everybody needs some form of service on at least a weekly basis, where they voluntarily give themselves away without receiving any personal benefit in

return. I think you need it as a counterbalance to what our culture encourages. **Sign up for an IMPACT TEAM!**

You have 168 hours each week. God doesn't want you to spend them all on yourself. You need a place of service where you say, "I'm going to give myself away." The apostle Paul comes through for us again when he says, "God has ... given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ago He planned that we should spend these lives in helping others" Ephesians 2:10).

What's the word that describes the drive of your life? Money? Success? Fame? Power? Those things will *not* satisfy. Jesus said, "... Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the good news will ever know what it means to really live" (Mark 8:35).

If you're not giving your life away, you're just existing. You're not living. Only those who give their lives away in service know what it means to really live. The world says, "Get all you can." Jesus Christ says the exact opposite – "Give all you can."

### 3. PRACTICE SELF DENIAL.

This is not a popular concept. But every day you need to find at least one opportunity where you can choose to do *the thing of conviction*, rather than *the thing of convenience*.

One time a guy was washing the dishes. He asked his wife, "Where in the Bible does it say a man's job is to wash dishes." The wife answers, "2 Kings 21:13, 'And I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.'" Seriously, in a society where everybody else is saying live only for yourself, think only for yourself, we, as believers, must be different, go against the flow, and not just think of ourselves.

Jesus said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross *daily*, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). **Daily.** In other words, he must make it a daily habit. Every-once-in-a-while doesn't cut it.

What does it mean to really deny yourself? Let me give you a few practical answers:

- When you can watch those close to you prosper and succeed without feeling jealous, but rather rejoice in their success, then you know the meaning of "deny yourself."
- When you can see other people reach goals you've failed to reach, and see others receive rewards and recognition that you'd like to have, without being envious, that's denying yourself.
- When you see other people's needs being met while your needs are not, and you don't question God or fail to be grateful for what you do have, that's denying yourself.
- When you choose to serve your spouse or children and put their needs ahead of yours, that's denying yourself.
- When you share your faith at work or school knowing that you may be insulted or put down, that's denying yourself.
- When you don't seek praise or fish for compliments and approval from others, and when you can live without constantly being recognized and applauded, that's denying yourself.

- When you draw out the other person in conversation rather than telling your stories and opinions, that's denying yourself.
- When you tell the truth, even at the risk of personal expense, that's denying yourself.
- When you pay your fair share of taxes while many others are cheating, that's denying yourself.
- When you can accept criticism willingly and learn from it with a teachable attitude, that's denying yourself.
- When you can be content with less than the best of circumstances without griping or complaining, when you can accept interruptions that God places in your schedule and patiently endure irritations, that's denying yourself.
- When people break their promises and let you down, and you refuse to become bitter, when you are misjudged unfairly and your motives are questioned and you don't retaliate, that's denying yourself.
- When you are content to let God settle the score, and content to wait for your reward in heaven, that's denying yourself.

Would you pray this prayer in your heart right now, "God, help me to build strong relationships. Help me to find a place of service where I can give my life away. Help me to practice self-denial daily in a culture that says, 'Think only of yourself'. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen"

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-10

### WHAT IS MARTYRDOM?

Excerpts from *Encountering Missionary Life and Work*, © 2008 by Tom Steffen and Lois McKinney Douglas, Pub. by Baker Academic, Grand Rapids

#### “What is Martyrdom”

“Martyrdom is derived the Greek word *martyrus*. The verb form, *martyreo*, integrates concepts of truth and Scripture into its meaning. It is closely associated with ‘witness.’ Jesus was a witness to the truth (Matt. 26:65; Mark 14:63; Luke 22:71); the apostles were sent as his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The meaning of ‘martyr’ is extended still further to include Christlike values such as faithfulness, truth, witness, and simple lifestyle...”

Thus the concept of martyrdom goes well beyond being killed for a cause or belief. It includes all that God has done through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the church, and in our individual lives. It includes bearing up under persecution in the name of Jesus Christ and being willing to lose our lives for his sake... The Orthodox Church recognizes this broader definition by distinguishing three kinds of martyrdom: ‘white’ martyrdom involves giving up wealth and adopting a contemplative lifestyle; ‘green’ martyrdom demands living simply in order to experience God more deeply and share him with others, and ‘red’ martyrdom involves shedding your blood and giving your life for Jesus...”

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 include a special blessing for those who were being persecuted. Jesus told them to rejoice and be glad (Matt. 5:10-12). He spoke these words knowing that some of his closed disciples would become martyrs...”

(Pages 308-309)

#### Why Are Christians Persecuted and Martyred?

“There is no single answer to this “Why?” question. Sometimes there is ideological opposition to the Christian message. Missionaries and church members suffer prejudice, discrimination, imprisonment, torture, and even death because they are naming the name of Christ and propagating their faith in contexts where this is considered blasphemy or heresy. This kind of persecution is more likely to occur when there is a Christian witness over a long period of time, conversions are occurring, and groups of believers are beginning to form. Paul’s ministry is a good example of this process. Persecution mushroomed and spread as news of conversions resulting from his witness and encouragement of new believers followed him from place to place.

Political issues are often intertwined with persecution. Missionaries and other outsiders may be seen as intruders and troublemakers when they enter an unreached region with their message. Their public witness may be considered a political crime. Those who accept their

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message may be seen as disloyal to their country and rejecting their own culture. These political and ideological issues can become so intermingled that it is hard to separate them. It is even more difficult to answer the ‘Why?’ questions they raise...

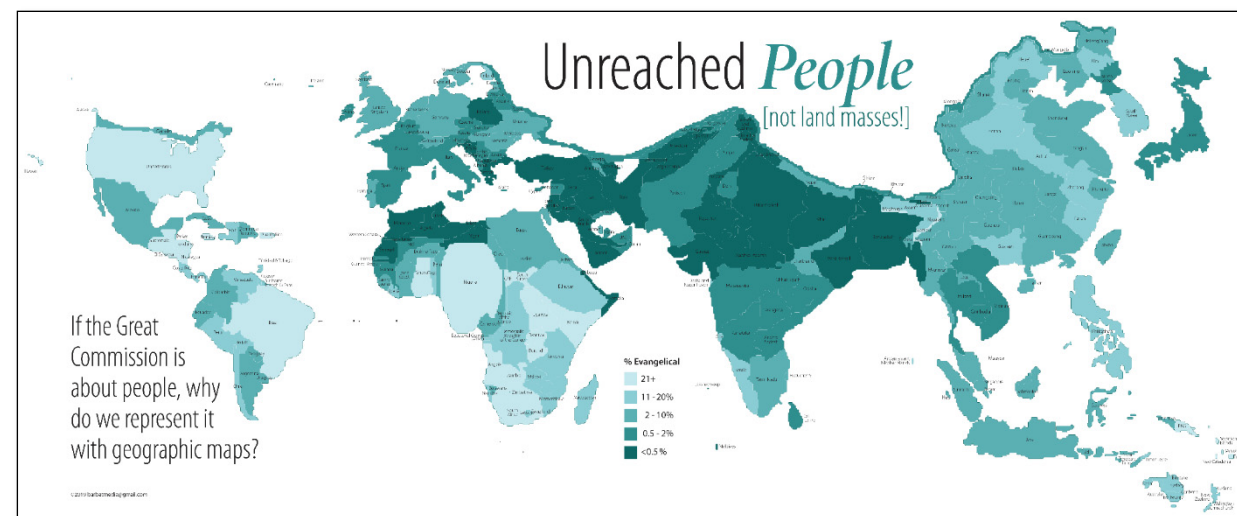
At its core, our answer to the ‘Why?’ question is intricately linked to God’s desire to win glory for himself in all things... ‘The persecution of his people is one means by which he does this... As Paul wrote, ‘... I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ...’ This single-minded devotion to gain Christ is what God will use to overcome the world. In Mark 13:9 Jesus says, ‘But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings, *for my sake as a testimony to them*’ [emphasis added]. So persecution is for Jesus’s sake to win him glory, and as a testimony of the gospel to the persecutors (1 Pet. 4:12-16).”

(Pages 310-311)

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## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-10

Geographic maps skew our perception of the task. Huge unpopulated areas look like a priority, while geographically small regions with huge populations (like Bangladesh and Java) are overlooked, and the diverse populations of single but large countries (like India and China) are under-represented. This world map is a cartogram based on 2020 population estimates – every pixel represents 100,000 people, shaded by percentage Evangelical.



## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-10

# 5 Shocking Realities About the Real State of Pastor Burnout

<https://www.wnccumc.org/resourcedetail/5-shocking-realities-about-the-real-state-of-pastor-burnout-17392915>

April 12, 2023

It's time to talk about a challenging topic that's been on a lot of hearts lately: Pastor burnout. As you know, ministry can be an incredibly rewarding and fulfilling calling. It can also be deeply challenging and exhausting. And unfortunately, many pastors are struggling with burnout and discouragement at historic levels.

How quickly have things changed?

In 2015, 72% of pastors said they felt “very satisfied” with their job as pastors.

In late 2022, just 52% of pastors were “very satisfied with their jobs.”

That's a staggering 20% drop over the course of six years—and it's a trend no ministry leader can afford to ignore. Between emotional exhaustion, chronic stress, and the ramp-up in pastors experiencing burnout, ministry has never felt more difficult.

Barna CEO David Kinnaman recently told me, “A drop in the level of pastoral health drop this significant in just 7 years isn't just unprecedented, it signals a crisis that the church has to address.”

I couldn't agree more.

You're not alone if you're struggling as a pastor or church leader. Pastors are burned out, tired of ministry, and exhausted at historic levels.

To make matters worse, and as you'll see in the statistics below, the crisis is more acute with younger church leaders than it is with older pastors. Given that the average senior pastor is in his or her late fifties, the coming succession crisis might worsen as younger leaders burn out or tap out.

According to new Barna research, five areas, in particular, have seen significant drops. We'll look at each in turn.

Note: This article references exclusive content available in Barna's Resilient Pastor Initiative. You can access the report and more through Barna Access.

### 1. Pastors' Overall Well-Being Has Taken a Hit

The overall well-being of pastors has hit a disturbing low.

The overall well-being of pastors has hit a disturbing low. If you think that's hyperbole or an exaggeration, consider the following data.

In just seven years, pastors reporting 'Excellence' in their:

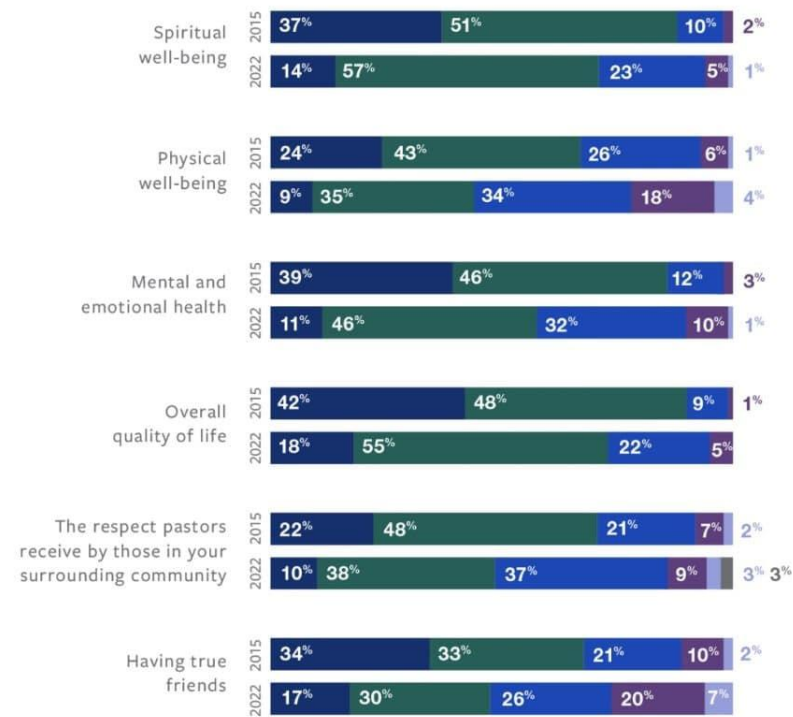
- Spiritual well-being dropped from 37% to 14%

- Physical well-being fell from 24% to 9%
- Mental and emotional health plummeted from 39% to 11%
- Overall quality of life dipped from 42% to 18%
- Level of respect they felt from the community tanked from 22% to 10%
- Level of ‘true friends’ dropped by 50% from 34% to 17%
- 

**PASTORS' SATISFACTION, THEN & NOW**

Please rate how satisfied you are right now when it comes to:

● Excellent ● Good ● Average ● Below average ● Poor ● Don't know



Source: Barna Group  
n=512 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, April–December 2015; n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022.

This has implications beyond just the health of senior pastors and their staff. Because the health of a leader impacts the health of a church, we’ll see a ripple effect of pastoral exhaustion that could damage churches for years to come.

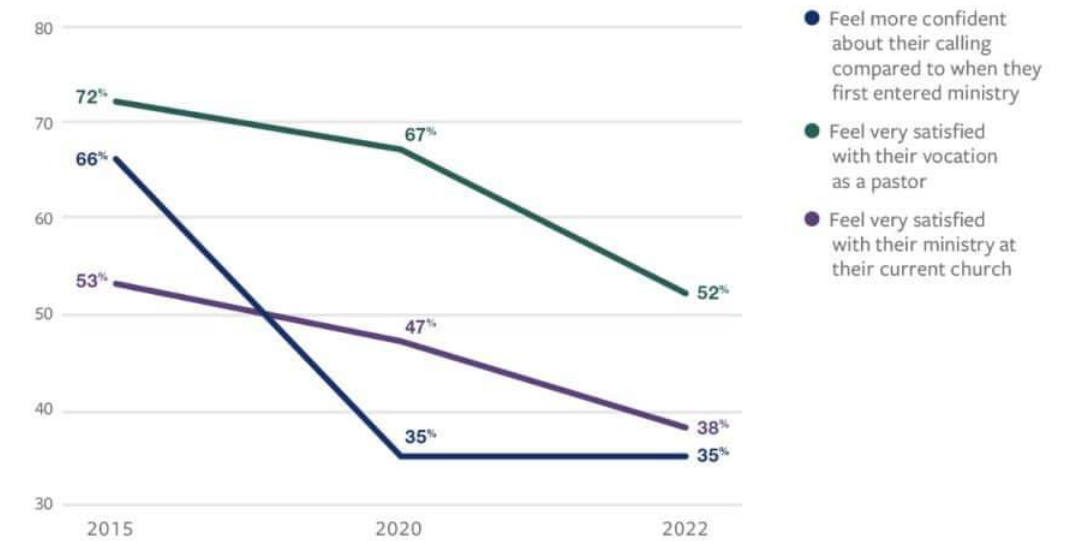
**2. Pastors’ Confidence in Their Calling Is Plummeting**

In addition to the 20% dip in pastors’ satisfaction with their calling (outlined above), pastors are questioning their call to their *current* church.

In 2016, 53% of pastors said they were ‘Very Satisfied’ with their current church. Today, only 38% say they’re very satisfied with their current church.

In a similar vein, in 2015, 66% of pastors said they felt more confident in their calling into ministry than they did when they first entered ministry. Today, only 35% of pastors say they feel more confident in their calling than when they started.

**PASTORAL CONFIDENCE, THEN & NOW**



Source: Barna Group  
n=901 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, April–December 2015; n=408 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 16–October 20, 2020; n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022.

And as anyone in ministry knows, it’s hard to continue in ministry when you regularly question your call to ministry. Something’s got to give.

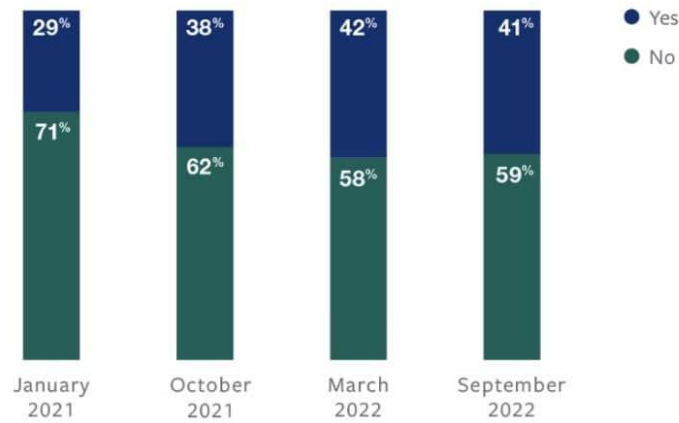
**3. Pastor Burnout Has Reached a “Five-Alarm Fire” Level**

An astonishing 40% of pastors now show a high risk of burnout. That’s an almost 400% increase since 2015, when that number was just 11%.

One of the most quoted statistics in the last few years has been the results to this question from Barna: **“Have you given real, serious consideration to quitting being in full-time ministry within the last year?”**

The trends are below in this chart, but in 2022, over 40% consistently answered yes when asked if they seriously considered throwing in the towel.

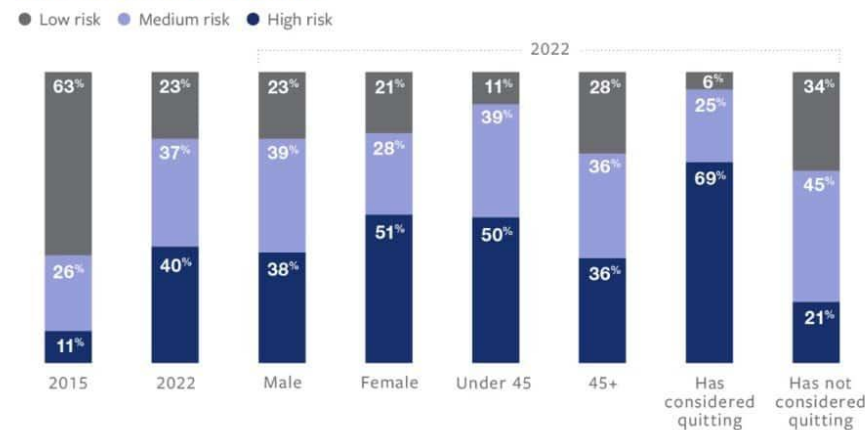
**HAVE YOU GIVEN REAL, SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO QUITTING BEING IN FULL-TIME MINISTRY WITHIN THE LAST YEAR?**



Source: Barna Group  
 n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022; n=510 U.S. Protestant pastors, March 10–16, 2021; n=507 U.S. Protestant pastors, October 12–28, 2021; n=413 U.S. Protestant pastors, January 22–27, 2021.

As the demands and polarization of many congregations escalate, social shifts continue unabated, and pastors grow more isolated, a perfect ministry storm for burnout has moved in. An astonishing 40% of pastors now show a high risk of burnout. That’s an almost 400% increase since 2015 when that number was just 11%. Among pastors who are considering quitting, burnout risk skyrockets to 69%. But 21% of pastors who are not seriously thinking of leaving ministry are still at high risk of burnout.

**PASTORS' RISK OF BURNOUT**



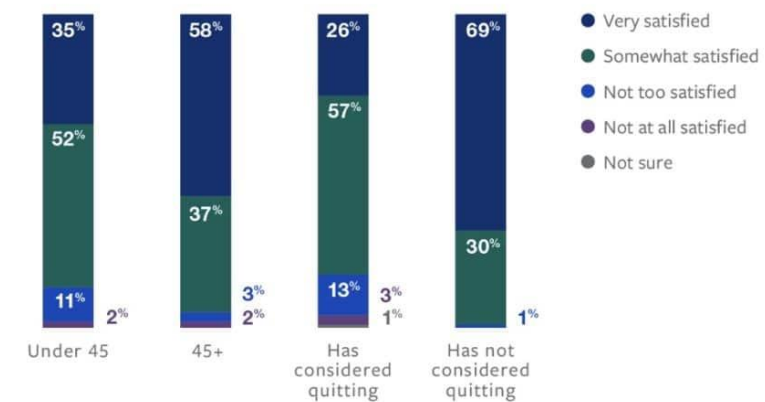
Source: Barna Group  
 n=900 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, April–December 2015; n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022.

The challenge with burnout is that if you don’t declare a finish line, your body will. Right now, that risk is at an all-time high.

**4. Young Pastors and Women Are Being Hit the Hardest**

Not all pastors are struggling at the same level. Two trends emerge: According to the latest research, the younger the pastors is, the deeper the struggle is. Only 35% of pastors under the age of 45 are ‘Very Satisfied’ with their vocation as a pastor, compared to 58% of those 45 or older.

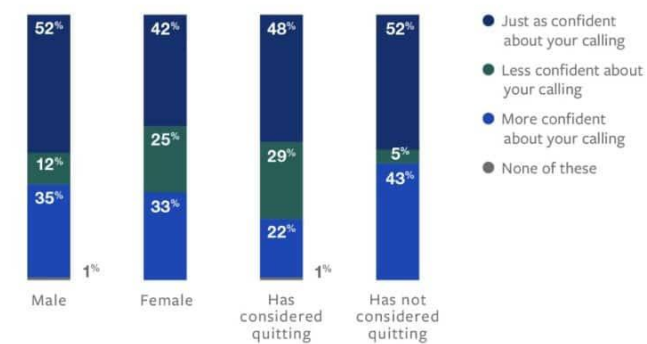
**2022: OVERALL, HOW SATISFIED WOULD YOU SAY YOU FEEL WITH YOUR VOCATION AS A PASTOR?**



Source: Barna Group  
 n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022.

Women have also been hit hard by discouragement in ministry. 52% of male pastors say they are just as confident about their calling as when they started; only 42% of women express the same confidence.

**2022: COMPARED TO WHEN YOU FIRST ENTERED PASTORAL MINISTRY, WOULD YOU SAY YOU FEEL ... ?**



Source: Barna Group  
 n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022.

Even more alarming, while 40% of all pastors are at high risk of burnout (see the chart in Point 3 above), 51% of women in church leadership and 50% of pastors under 45 are at high risk of burnout. Only 36% of pastors over 45 are at high risk of burnout.

It’s heartbreaking when many of the people who carry the present and future of the church— young leaders and women— are at their breaking point.

### 5. Pastors Don’t Feel Supported

As we move toward solutions, a few more statistics show you that the very medicine pastors need is something they appear not to be taking.

Take community support. Barna asked pastors: “How often, if ever, do you receive spiritual support, whether from a network of peers or from a mentor?”

**HOW OFTEN, IF EVER, DO YOU RECEIVE PERSONAL SPIRITUAL SUPPORT, EITHER FROM A NETWORK OF PEERS OR FROM A MENTOR?**

● Several times a month or more often ● Once or twice a month ● Several times a year ● Not very often ● Never



Source: Barna Group  
n=525 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, April–December 2015; n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022.

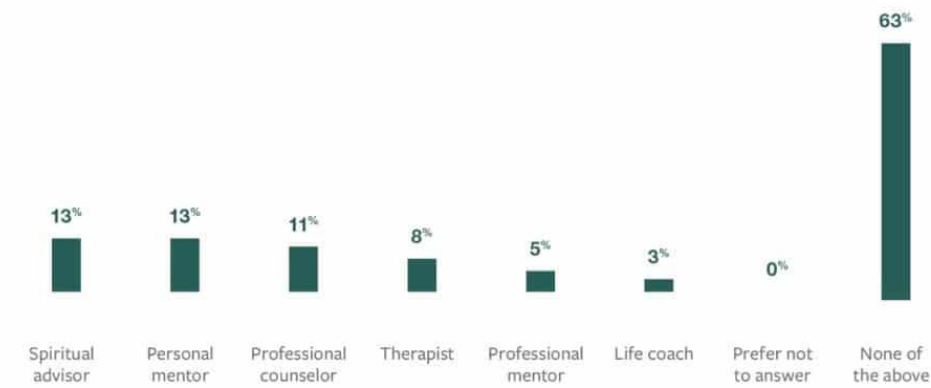
In 2015, 37% of pastors answered they receive that kind of support several times a month or more.

In 2022, only 22% of pastors said they had any regular support.

Drilling down further, only 11% of pastors said they went to a professional counselor, 8% saw a therapist, and only 13% sought out a spiritual advisor. Fully 63% of pastors said they never sought out any kind of support.

**IF YOU DON’T MIND SHARING, DO YOU CURRENTLY USE THE SERVICES OF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?**

Please select all that apply.



Source: Barna Group  
n=584 U.S. Protestant senior pastors, September 6–12, 2022.

Self-care doesn’t seem to be providing a solution either.

When pastors were asked what they do to recharge, 76% of pastors cited ‘spending time with family,’ 72% said they got rest or slept, and 66% said they prayed. Only 25% of pastors said they sought out things that inspired them, while 20% said they went to counseling or therapy.

There’s nothing wrong with spending time with family or getting sleep. Church leaders need more of that. But it’s hardly a recipe for curing burnout.

The data shows that most pastors don’t appear to have even the beginning of a plan to get healthy or truly restore themselves in their time off.

Instead, most pastors continue to isolate themselves from any real help.

The problem with that is that solitude is a gift from God. Isolation is a tool of the enemy.

### So, What Do We Do?

When you consider the state of mental health among church leaders, the analysis is sobering. This isn’t a time for guilt and shame, though, it’s a time for help. Too many pastors feel burned by their work to feel burned by their data.

Here are a few things that can help nurture pastors back to health:

#### i. Take the state of affairs seriously

We’re nearing the point in the church where if we don’t take pastoral health seriously, our ill health will take us.

We’re nearing the point in the church where if we don’t take pastoral health seriously, our ill health will take us.

It’s too easy to look at data this stark and conclude that ‘COVID was tough’. A collapse in pastoral health this deep doesn’t happen because of a pandemic (as challenging as that was). While it’s impossible to say exactly why things are trending the way they are, it’s essential to realize this isn’t just a season of ministry.

We often write off ill health by saying, “It’s just a busy season.” Seasons have beginnings, and seasons have endings. If your busy season has no end, it’s not a season, it’s your life.

#### ii. Understand the depth of the problem (Hint: This is personal)

I went through a season of burnout years ago and can relate to the struggle. On my personal road to burnout, I kept thinking the rules didn’t apply to me – there was *no* way I could burn out.

The problem is that the rules never apply to you until they do. And then, it’s too late.

That’s exactly what happened to me.

In the 17 years since my burnout, I’ve lived with a very deep sense of how fragile and frail I really am. Paradoxically, that kind of awareness and respect for what can go wrong in the human soul has made me stronger, not weaker. But I wake up each day fully realizing I’m a few bad decisions and choices from hitting the ditch again.

The greatest threat to your ministry is not what’s happening around you, but what’s happening within you. Take care of yourself, so that you can continue to care for others.

#### iii. Get Some Help

You didn’t burn out by yourself, and you can’t get well by yourself either. For me, it took counselors, coaches, friends, family, and a great community of support.

You won’t be any different.

Take a look again at the data in Point 5 above. The isolation church leaders are living in only makes things worse, not better. The best first step in dealing with burnout is to tell a friend who loves you enough to tell you the truth and ensure you get professional help.

I promise you that my team and I are doing all we can to help reverse the decline in the church, which starts with the leaders' health. I have more practical resources that will help, but please know you can't do this alone. The future of a healthy church starts with leaders who are committed to getting healthy. Breaking the silence and getting help is a meaningful first step in the right direction.

## HANDOUT DISCIPLESHIP 102-11

# Pastors, Teach the Truth and Expose Error

By: Scot Chadwick

July 6, 2018

## Introduction

In 1865, renowned British pastor Charles Spurgeon began publishing the monthly magazine titled *The Sword and the Trowel*. He derived the publication's name from *Nehemiah 4:17-18* which recorded how God's people rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem while enduring verbal and physical opposition. Spurgeon summarized his goal for the magazine by stating,

We shall supply interesting reading upon general topics, but our chief aim will be to arouse believers to action, and to suggest to them plans by which the Kingdom of Jesus may be extended. . . . We would sound the trumpet, and lead our comrades to the fight. We would ply the Trowel with untiring hand for the building up of Jerusalem's dilapidated walls, and wield the Sword with vigour and valour against the enemies of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

As illustrated by Spurgeon's mention of the constructive trowel and the combative sword, the work of church leaders inherently resides in the two tasks of formatively teaching the truth and militantly exposing error.<sup>2</sup> Because pastors serve the church in these critical roles, we must exhibit appropriate characteristics and skills in key areas.<sup>3</sup> One of the skills necessary for a pastor is that he must be "able to teach" (*1 Timothy 3:2*),<sup>4</sup> which Paul describes more fully as "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (*Titus 1:9*). This verse provides great insight into the predominant work of pastors to teach the truth and refute error.

Pastors, we can never say that our work is done in this age because there is always more truth to teach and obey both personally and in the church.

All of the verbs in this verse are in the present tense, indicating continual action throughout a pastor's ministry. We can never say that our work is done in this age because there is always more truth to teach and obey both personally and in the church, there will always be errors creeping in that need gentle correction (*2 Timothy 4:3-4*; cf. *Galatians 6:1*), and there will always be false teachers who need to be refuted. The corresponding tasks of teaching and refuting are both responsibilities of all elders. Certain of us may favor teaching more than refuting or refuting more than teaching, and surely God has given each of us certain passions and degrees of skill in these areas. But God expects that all pastors be competent and confident to perform both activities when it becomes necessary and appropriate.

## Devoted to the Word of God

In order to teach and refute, we must know the Scripture intimately ourselves. Paul says elders must hold “fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching.” This indicates a firm personal devotion to the Word of God from an ardent desire and proven ability to study and learn from Scripture. Pastors must be able to converse theologically, using biblical terminology to view and interpret life through the lens of God’s Word. We must exercise the attention of the Israelites to the Word of God, when the Lord says, “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart” (*Deuteronomy 6:6*). Be like Ezra, who “had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel” (*Ezra 7:10*). We should emulate the unique loyalty to God’s Word as found in the attitude of the disciples when they said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (*John 6:68*).

Pastors must be able to converse theologically, using biblical terminology to view and interpret life through the lens of God’s Word.

Many things might influence pastors to neglect the Word of God. Certainly the full schedule of pastoring while also leading and caring for our own families may tempt us to neglect the meditation on and study of the Scripture. Perhaps we do not appreciate the urgent need to be filled with the Word of God in order to faithfully deliver it to others. Maybe we are just being lazy or complacent, or we want to pursue other ministry strategies that we think will “really” make a difference in our churches. Perhaps we have a low regard for the Bible as God’s sufficient and authoritative revelation for our age, and we prefer rather to pay attention to what are hailed as more “relevant” voices. Perhaps confined by the fear of man, we are embarrassed to hold fast to Scripture in the midst of a perverse and God-denying generation. Whatever the reason, as John MacArthur states, “If you’re not holding on to the faithful Word, then you’re in no position to be teaching it. No one can teach or preach effectively without strong, personal, compassionate commitment to the truth.”<sup>5</sup>

What is this “faithful word” that pastors are to hold fast? This phrase “faithful word” or variations of it appear numerous times in the New Testament to emphasize the true and reliable nature of God’s Word.<sup>6</sup> The Bible was inspired by God and delivered through his apostles and prophets, is inerrant and infallible in its teachings, and is sufficient in its effectual work.<sup>7</sup> God’s Word stands in contrast to man’s word which varies in reliability, truth, and effectiveness. Scripture comes from “God, who cannot lie” (*Titus 1:2*), and was not “made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (*2 Peter 1:21*).

Paul further states that “the faithful word” pastors are to hold fast must be “in accordance with the teaching.” This refers to the content of what has been taught by the apostles and prophets from Moses to John, from Genesis to Revelation (cf. *Ephesians 2:20*). As the early church in Jerusalem devoted “themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (*Acts 2:42*), so too should pastors measure their teaching against the standard of the Bible (cf. *2 Peter 3:15–16*).

If our teaching is not inherently obvious from the text, we must either show how we derived our ideas from the text or abandon that line of thought.

Our teaching should elucidate the text, and our people should be able to clearly derive our teaching from the text. If our teaching is not inherently obvious from the text, we must either show how we derived our ideas from the text or abandon that line of thought. We should be reticent to present a new idea that we may see in a text but that we cannot corroborate from other students of the Bible throughout history. Pastors should not seek to be innovative with our teaching. As shepherds under the authority of Christ, we must follow Jesus’ own example when he said, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (*John 7:16*). Our authority in teaching and leading the church comes through the Scripture. We may not accrue to ourselves authority beyond our station as a teacher of the Word of God. (cf. *Hebrews 13:7*; *1 Thessalonians 5:12–13*). Paul instructs Timothy, “If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing” (*1 Timothy 6:3–4*). We must take great care that our teaching comes from and is according to the Scripture.

The Apostle Paul says that the purpose and necessary result of a pastor’s devotion to the Word of God is “that he will be able” to teach the truth and refute error. Since we should wish to increase in these specific skills, we ought to redouble our efforts to “let the word of Christ richly dwell within” us (*Colossians 3:16*). Even eloquent teachers can grow in understanding and skill to teach the Word of God more faithfully (cf. *Acts 18:24–26*). While God gives certain levels of giftedness and effectiveness to certain pastors, all pastors have the responsibility to serve the church with the truth.

## Teach the Truth

Pastors, teach the truth of God’s Word. The word translated here as *exhort* has the sense of making an urgent appeal, indicating the imperative nature of the teaching. Paul says similarly to Timothy that he should “teach and preach [i.e., exhort or urgently appeal to our hearers to follow] these principles” (*1 Timothy 6:2*), and to “preach [i.e., proclaim or herald] the word” (*2 Timothy 4:2*). Pastors, we should not teach merely to impart knowledge but also to change lives, as Paul says to the Thessalonian church, “We request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more” (*1 Thessalonians 4:1*; cf. *2:11–12*).

Pastors, don’t teach merely to impart knowledge but also to change lives.

Elders are “to exhort in sound doctrine,” giving correct and accurate teaching to the church. This “healthy” or life-giving doctrine especially contrasts with the sickly, diseased, and unprofitable doctrine of the false teachers (*1 Timothy 4:1–3*; *2 Timothy 2:17*, *3:1–9*). While the word sound can refer to physical health (e.g., *Luke 5:31*; *3 John 2*), Paul uses this word repeatedly throughout his letters to Timothy and Titus to refer figuratively to “healthy” or life-giving doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Pastors, we must teach with a view toward the maturity of the church. This maturity can be measured by increased knowledge and greater discernment, as well as character and conduct that is appropriate to sound doctrine (*Ephesians 4:1ff.*; *Titus 2:1ff.*). Thankfully, God’s Word is powerfully able to effect change in the lives of those who humbly follow its teachings, “that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (*2 Timothy 3:17*). Following Paul’s example, pastors are to proclaim Jesus Christ, “admonishing every man and teaching

every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ” (*Colossians 1:28*).

## Expose Error

In addition to teaching sound words, pastors are “to refute those who contradict” sound doctrine. This means we must discern error and show false teaching to be contrary to Scripture. This is more than merely a rebuke or verbal reprimand, but is to be a thorough debunking of contradictory teachers. One commentator says that to refute someone “signifies a presentation of evidence so that the arguments of the opponents are beaten down and proved to be baseless.”<sup>9</sup>

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Given the stunningly characteristic reprobation of the Cretan peoples, it is quite noteworthy that Paul exhorts Titus to go and rebuke them “so that they may be sound in the faith” (*Titus 1:13*). Paul believes in the redemptive and transforming capacity of the gospel, even so that it can overcome centuries’ worth of ingrained wickedness. He communicates a similar idea to Timothy regarding errant believers:

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (*2 Timothy 2:24–26*)

While we would normally expect genuine believers to respond favorably to sound teaching as an indication of the Spirit of truth indwelling them, some professing believers have “suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith” (*1 Timothy 1:19*). False teachers continually afflict the church with error,<sup>10</sup> and some gullible, professing Christians will be deceived and fall away from the faith to follow these deceitful teachings.<sup>11</sup> Teachers may be tempted to adapt their message to seek “the favor of men” rather than the favor of God (*Galatians 1:10*), and people “wanting to have their ears tickled . . . will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (*2 Timothy 4:3–4*). We are fascinated with new or otherwise “secret” knowledge from the Scripture (*1 Timothy 1:3–4; Titus 3:9*), and we sometimes fail to interpret the Scriptures correctly to discern the truth (*2 Timothy 2:15*). We also can tend toward “selfish ambition or vain conceit” that prevents us from “being of the same mind” (*Philippians 2:2–3*), resulting in doctrinal division.<sup>12</sup> For these and other reasons, elders must be vigilant to teach the truth and refute error (*Acts 20:28*).

## Conclusion

A diligent pastor must hold “fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able to both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” We must stand on the clear Word of God as if our lives depended on it: “Pay close attention to

yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (*1 Timothy 4:16*). In all our teaching and refuting, we must be careful to love God and compassionately care for others, being valiant for the truth and aggressive in love (cf. *Ephesians 4:15; Jude 20–23; Revelation 2:2–4*). Remember that as a teacher of God’s holy Word, we “will incur a stricter judgment” (*James 3:1*). Elders must faithfully shepherd of the church of God, and may the Lord give us fruitful labor in his name.

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## Footnotes

1. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Susannah Spurgeon, and W. J. Harrald, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon* vol. 3 (Chicago, New York, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899), 308.
2. Note that elders, pastors (or shepherds), and overseers (or bishops) refer to the same group of mature, godly men who provide leadership and instruction in a local church. See *Acts 14:23; 15:2, 16:4, 20:17, 28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13; 1 Timothy 3:1–7, 5:17; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1–3; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24*. These terms will be used interchangeably in this article.
3. We can read about these qualifications in *1 Timothy 3:1–7, Titus 1:6–9, and 1 Peter 5:1–3*.
4. Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. [www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org).
5. John MacArthur, “The Qualifications for a Pastor, Part 3: Teaching Skill,” *Grace to You*, December 27, 1992, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/56-9/the-qualifications-for-a-pastor-part-3-teaching-skill>.
6. See *1 Timothy 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8; Revelation 21:5, 22:6*.
7. Regarding the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of Scripture, see Brian Edwards, “Why Should We Believe in the Inerrancy of Scripture?,” *Answers in Genesis*, July 5, 2011, <https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/why-should-we-believe-in-the-inerrancy-of-scripture/>; regarding the transmission of Scripture, see Tim Chaffey, “Fragments of Truth Film Review,” *Answers in Genesis*, April 21, 2018, <https://answersingenesis.org/reviews/movies/fragments-of-truth/>; and regarding the sufficiency of Scripture, see Phil Johnson, “One Book Is Sufficient,” *Answers* 10, no. 1 (2015), <https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/one-book-sufficient/>.
8. See *1 Timothy 1:10, 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13, 4:3; Titus 1:13, 2:1*.
9. D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 36.
10. See *Acts 20:29–30; 2 Timothy 3:13; Titus 1:10*.
11. See *Genesis 3:13; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:13*.
12. See *Romans 16:17–18; 1 Corinthians 11:18–19; Titus 3:9–11*.

HANDOUT  
DISCIPLESHIP 102-12

**Barriers to Fruitfulness**

Barrier	John 15:1–2 Explanation	Implication
Lack of proper nourishment	Poor supply of water or nutrients will destroy the vine.	If Christ’s life and love do not flow in us, we will be spiritually unproductive.
Disease	Insects and disease move from dead wood into healthy plants.	Ongoing sin and unresolved past issues will lead to spiritual ineffectiveness.
Immature branches	New branches require several years of pruning before they can produce.	We need time to grow. Growth may involve suffering.
Improper pruning	A wise gardener knows what to remove in order to bring about fruitfulness.	Our priorities and the focus of our energies must be guided by Christ and his Word, not our own wisdom and desires.
No Gardener	Vines need constant attention.	Resistance to God’s guidance and pruning leads to unfruitfulness.
Separated from the Vine	Branches must be attached to a healthy root stock.	We must not think for a moment that we are capable of surviving apart from Jesus Christ. He is the giver and sustainer of life!

Wilson, N., & Taylor, L. (2001). Tyndale Handbook of Bible Charts & Maps (p. 342). Tyndale House Publishers.

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