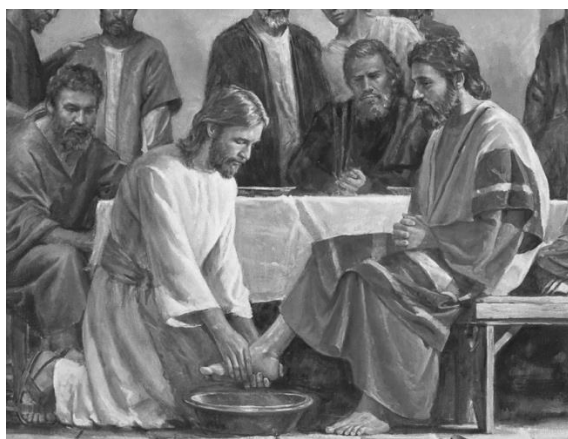


KINGDOM
DISCIPLESHIP
BECOMING A DISCIPLE
LIKE JESUS



A Study Guide for Pastors, Evangelists, and Ministry Leaders
And for All Who Want to Follow Jesus as Lord of Their Life

By: Frederick Osborn

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Matthew 28:18-20

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The world measures greatness by that which can be seen; by what can be measured on a scale, weighed in a balance, or counted. This is not so in the kingdom. In the kingdom of God, greatness is measured not by quantity, but by quality. It is by the quality of the life within that greatness is measured. Jesus illustrated this principle with the parable of the mustard seed. The mustard seed is the smallest seed in the garden, and yet when it is grown, it becomes as great or greater than any other plant. The size of mustard seed has nothing to do with the greatness of the mustard tree; it is the quality of the life-force within that makes it great.

So it is with my friend, Pastor John Brown. He will never be considered a great man by the world's measurement of greatness; he has never written a best-selling book; never been the pastor of a mega-church with thousands of members listening intently to every word that comes out of his mouth; and he has never been the head of an international satellite TV network ministry. The world takes little note of his ministry to the body of Christ, but there is greatness in him. What makes Pastor Brown great in the kingdom is the quality of life that is in him. He would not nor could not ever take any credit for that life, because as he himself would be so quick to point out, it is not him doing it, but a life not his own who says and does it all.

My introduction to what I have decided to call "Kingdom Discipleship" came a long time before I had any inkling about what it truly meant to be a follower of Jesus. I was almost thirty years old before I became a Christian, and because I had not been raised in a "church-going home" I had little knowledge of the Bible. Practically all I knew when I had my salvation experience was that Jesus loved me and forgave me of all of my sins. I was determined to press on from that point and live "the Christian life." However, not only did I not know anything about what that meant, but I also soon discovered that there were vastly different understandings about what it meant to live a Christian life among the Christians I began to associate with for the first time in my life.

Like so many others, I became a Christian at a moment of crisis in my life; the years of living a selfish, self-centered, and self-indulgent lifestyle finally caught up with me and my life had become a total train wreck. Jesus literally rescued me from self-destruction and turned my life around. Unfortunately, I was such a mess that it took years of mental, emotional, and

spiritual healing before I was much use to anyone – including myself. I imagine that most people who knew me when I was still a “baby Christian” probably thought that I would never make it; that I was too big of a “screw-up” in the kingdom of God to last for the long run. And to be honest, I had to agree with them. And at one point in time I left the Church, not because I stopped believing in the Lord, but because I thought if I could not “walk the walk” I should not “talk the talk” and did not want to be just one more hypocrite in the church who professed something he was incapable of living.

There were a few bright and shining lights in my life in those years and one of them was Pastor John Brown. I first met Pastor John Brown at a small Calvary Chapel Church that we were both attending for a short time. The first time he shared something from the word of God, I knew there was something different about him... something genuine... something I wanted to imitate. For a number of years I followed and watched John Brown from a distance. I could not say that we were close or that he was mentoring me or discipling me – but he was setting an example for me. I saw in him a genuine Christlike character that I knew I was far, far from having, but whenever I heard him teach and whenever I was around him, I would think to myself, “That’s it; that’s the way I need to go.” He never said it, but I could sense in my spirit the words of Paul when he said, “Follow me as I follow Christ,” and though he did not know it at the time, he became a role model for me. Whenever I felt like I would never figure out what this “Christian life” was all about, I would think of John Brown and believe there was a way through whatever Wilderness experience I was in and press onward. Of course, I never had any illusions that John Brown was a perfect human being without any flaws; but that was okay. What drew me to him was the fact that he was a man without guile; he was the genuine “coin of the realm.” And so I would make it a point no matter where I went or what I was doing to never lose touch with him.

Then around 2004, I heard that John Brown was teaching a series called “The Way, Truth, and Life” and I committed myself to attending the entire teaching that would take months to complete. The weeks I sat under his teaching on the kingdom of God and discipleship was a transformational time in my life. John’s teachings were instrumental in finally bringing clarity and direction in my long journey with God. “The Way, Truth, and Life” series brought together in a powerful way much of what the Lord had been teaching John for the years that I knew him.

And by the time I finished the course, the Lord was putting more resources into my hands to fill in and fill out what John had just taught on what living the “Christian Life” was truly all about.

By October of 2005, the Lord had totally changed the course of my life and I entered into full-time kingdom work as a missionary to South Asia. I quickly discovered that the work the Lord had for me to do was to teach and train village pastors, evangelists, and ministry leaders across India the Biblical principles of leadership and discipleship in a series of seminar teachings – which I have been doing faithfully by God’s grace and mercy for almost eight years now. Then in 2013, the Holy Spirit put a strong urging in my heart to write down everything I could – everything He had been teaching me – about the kingdom and discipleship into one Study Guide to be translated and taught throughout South Asia. And so was born the book you now hold in your hands: *“Kingdom Discipleship: Becoming and Making Disciples Like Jesus – A Study Guide for Pastors, Evangelists, and Ministry Leaders.”*

As you study this book, you will discover the thoughts of many fine men of God who deeply influenced me through their writings and in some cases, by the story of their life. You will also discover that there is nothing “new” or “sensational” in this study. For some this study may seem “unfamiliar” or even “radical” in many ways because so little of it is based upon what has come to be accepted as the “normal” Christian life by the modern church. In many ways this study is a call to a life beyond anything imaginable by most Christians in this day and age. It was certainly unimaginable to me before I heard John Brown teaching it. But I owe much of what is written here to John. In the past few years our relationship has grown and I am now bold enough to call him more than an inspiration, but “my friend” and a fellow traveler on *The Way*.

So I dedicate this study guide to Pastor John Brown and to the many great men of God whom you will have the opportunity to know as I share their thoughts and their insights on the kingdom and discipleship throughout this study. It is my hope and prayer that everyone who takes the time to study and meditate upon these subjects will discover a transformed life in Christ that in the end will leave them changed forever.

God be with you all as you journey to discover “The Way, Truth, and Life” in Kingdom Discipleship.

PREAMBLE

Three Things God Lost In The Garden

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1

Where to begin? That is always the dilemma for anyone about to embark on a great theological journey. And once the starting point is decided upon, there are many possible trails a person can take through the Scriptures to hopefully reach their intended destination. So it is with this study of discipleship in the kingdom. My friend, Pastor John Brown, who first inspired me to take this road, began by posing a question that very few ever consider: “We know what Adam lost, but what did God lose when mankind Fell?” But before he could answer that question, he needed to lay some foundations that would lead up to that discovery of what God lost.

THE GOSPEL OF “ME”

“It’s easy to live as if we are the center of the universe. We wouldn’t ever say it, or even think it consciously, but we can live as if God is here for us. That has come across in a lot of teaching over the last thirty years. God is here to bless you. You ought to be rich. You ought to be prosperous. It’s your due to be successful. It’s your due to get ahead. God has to respond to your faith. God has obligated Himself to bless you if you do the right things. All of which means what? You are the center of the universe.” Dan Stone, From “The Rest of the Gospel”

Near the beginning of the Apostle John's *Revelation* the Lord gave seven brief but intense messages to the seven churches of Asia (what is now western Turkey). Almost from the beginning the church has wrestled with the meanings of those messages. Today, most orthodox, evangelical Christians identify those churches as representing the conditions of the church throughout the ages and leading up to today. In Western churches, and in particular the church in the United States of America, the church most often identified as representing the spirit of this church age is Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22). There is no time here, and it is unnecessary to go into a long commentary on this passage of Scripture to make the point that something was terribly wrong with the spiritual condition of this church. Laodicea was a church that believed it had it all; they were rich – overflowing with health, wealth, and prosperity. However, when seen through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, they were just the opposite: wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Key to Laodicea's condition was the fact that they did not know what condition they were in. The very nature of deception is that those who are being deceived do not know it. In the case of the Laodicean church, they had become so "self focused" that they could not see their true spiritual condition. The remedy for their deception was to turn from the "fool's gold" of a gospel that was all about them – a gospel they were happy to receive free of cost – and purchase pure gold that had been purified by fire: Truth from the Spirit of God. The truth they needed to see was that their salvation was not all about making them happy, healthy, and prosperous in this world. The gold, white garments, and salve for their eyes all have a purchase price that requires selling everything of value in this life to obtain something of the kingdom that is of infinitely more value (Note Matthew 13:44-46) than what they thought they had. In Proverbs, the Lord said, "*Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding*" (23:23). And what the Lord is offering the church today is nothing less than the same. If the offer of purchasing the truth is too high a price to pay, then deception will continue and the end result will be, even what the church has will be taken away (Matthew 25:29 and Luke 19:26). So the discovery of what was truly lost in the Garden and how to find it requires first a willingness to purchase some missing truth. And the disciple must be more than willing, and must actually *pay* the full purchase price (which is nothing less than "all") to get it.

The second prerequisite for discovering what was lost in the Garden is to realize that much of the church today is deceived when it thinks everything is about them. They bought a cheap "gospel of me" that says in essence:

- “Jesus became poor so I can live in a big house, drive a shiny new car, and have lots of money in the bank.”
- “Jesus paid it all so I don’t have to pay anything.”
- “Jesus suffered so I don’t have to.”
- “Health, wealth, and prosperity are my birthright as a ‘child of the king’.”
- “I don’t need to be perfect because I am forgiven.”
- “Salvation is my ‘ticket to heaven’ and my ‘fire insurance’ policy.”

The Laodicean church failed to learn an important lesson from Israel’s past and failed to heed the prophetic voice that had already been spoken. The prophet Ezekiel ministered to the nation of Judah during a dark time of international turmoil and unrest. Combined with the immorality and apostasy they had fallen into, the Lord’s judgment and the destruction of Jerusalem was imminent. However, in chapter 36 God promised His people that in spite of their rebellious condition, their salvation would come and in the end they would be restored to the land:

*“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: **“I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD,”** says the Lord GOD, **“when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.”**”* (22-23).

This thought – that what God was doing was not for Israel’s sake but was to accomplish His own plans and purposes – is a similar theme throughout the Old Testament (note Deuteronomy 9:1-6). It hints at what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do in the earth until His ultimate plan and purpose from the beginning of creation is fulfilled. Isaiah 45:23-25 says it with much greater clarity:

*“I have sworn by Myself;
The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,
And shall not return,
That to Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall take an oath.
He shall say, ‘Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength.*

*To Him men shall come,
And all shall be ashamed
Who are incensed against Him.
In the LORD all the descendants of Israel Shall be justified, and shall glory.’”*

This same theme appears in the New Testament as well in Hebrews 6:13-19. The example given is of God’s promise to Abraham; since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in his own name

“For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil...” 6:16-19 (NKJV)

The hope for our complete salvation is strong and the promise for our future redemption is an anchor for our souls, because it is God working out His divine plan for His purpose. It is Jesus Christ who mysteriously connects us with God himself in heavenly places beyond the veil of this time and place – which is something we have little understanding of.

In these prophetic passages – and many, many more like them, we see that the Lord’s salvation is about far, far more than a single nation or even the church. *The Day of the Lord’s* great salvation, prophetically proclaimed throughout the Scriptures, has yet to begin. What God lost, and what Adam’s race continues to lose, has yet to be revealed and restored in its fullness (Romans 8:18-22). The deception of the Laodicean church is that they believed it was all about what God had done for them – they were the center of the universe and in need of nothing more because God’s plan of salvation was completed at the cross. But truth be known, the cross is not about them (or us); it is, and was from before the beginning about HIM and what HE is doing in creation. Our salvation is not complete until the fullness of the resurrection is complete in us. It is for this other life – the resurrected life – that we have been saved and not for what benefits we can obtain here and now.

If the sons of Adam mistakenly believe that their salvation is the central focus of God's plan, then their theology would dictate that man was created so he would be lost and then saved again so God would somehow be glorified in that. If not then mankind's Fall was something of a surprise to God or a "glitch" in His plan instead of an integral part of His ultimate plan to perfect His creation – a plan that He Himself intends to accomplish. God's word tells us that the eternal, infinite, all-knowing, and all-powerful God of creation is doing something *for Himself* – something planned before the foundations of the heavens and the earth were laid – and in His infinite wisdom, He has chosen to include us who for a little while at least, are a little lower than the angels. It should be to our awe and amazement that we play any role at all in God's master plan. Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus should be a role model for all of us. When informed by the angel, Gabriel that she had been chosen out of every being in the cosmos to bear the Incarnation, her humble response was amen: *"Let it be to me according to your word."*

The same thing that brought the Laodicean church to the condition it is in is the same thing that caused Lucifer's fall with one third of the angelic host, Adam and Eve to fall, and that brought the ancient nation of Israel's downfall: self-deception. What Adam lost, and what continues to be lost, is the result of the same deception: **a loss of love for the truth of God that binds all of creation to its Creator.** Genesis 2:9 sets the stage, *"And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."* Of all the trees in the Garden, there were only two that were specifically mentioned by the Lord: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One was like all of the trees of the Garden in that it was meant for them to sustain their life; but it was not like all the others in that the life given by the fruit of this tree was no ordinary life. It was a life that was not of their dominion for God maintained control over their access to it. In their humanity, Adam and Eve were created for a life that is part of this time (in the beginning), space (heavens) and matter (earth) but at the same time they were being prepared for another life – a supernatural life above and beyond – and in fact they would never be truly complete ("normal" as God intended them to become when He made them) until the fullness of that other life was manifested in them as they ate of the tree of life. True, Adam and Eve were indeed created in the image and likeness of God. And because of the Spirit of God within, they had the potential to enter into the fullness of that other *Life*, which was something the tree of Life was created for and given to sustain. Because this other *Life* was

never revealed in its fullness in them it seems to have been as much of a mystery to Adam and Eve as it is to us today. So, little was revealed about it until the Son of God came to teach and demonstrate that *Life* to His disciples. In fact, Jesus said the mysteries of the kingdom are not for those who are “outside” but are only for those disciples who are fully committed and submitted to Him as their Savior AND Lord (Matthew 13:11).

God knew that the life intended for Adam and Eve could not be sustained once they were deceived and chose to partake of that which was not intended for them. A life lived out of their own understanding of judging what is good or evil would destroy the life lived out of communion with the Spirit – a spirit-to-Spirit life. Taking what did not belong to them would cause their spiritual death, and force God to permanently separate them from the tree of life “*lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever*” (Genesis 3:22). It appears that Adam and Eve never tasted the fruit of the tree of life. Instead they reached out and took the fruit of the tree of knowledge and died – at first spiritually, and eventually, physically.

One of the gravest deceptions of the church today is the idea that all people are made in the image of God. The text in Genesis that declares Adam being made in God’s image, is quoted as if it were a universal truth and nothing changed in this regard for humanity after The Fall. “The effects of Adam’s sin altered God’s intended plan for the course of life itself. For once sin entered into the world through Adam and Eve’s disobedience, both the physical and spiritual cycles of life and death were turned upside down...” (From *The Gospel of Salvation: Our Complete Salvation in Body, Soul, and Spirit*, published by Bibles for All Ministries, 2011). Something dramatic changed after The Fall and mankind were no longer to be created in God’s image, but were now in the image of another: Genesis 5:3 indicates that the sons of Adam were born into Adam’s likeness – not God’s. Since The Fall men and women are no longer created in God’s image, but are in fact in the image and likeness of Adam. What Adam lost – and what every human being since Adam has lost – is what makes it impossible for fallen man to become what he was created to be. Since The Fall, God’s plan has never been to repair, reform, or remake man into an image that was lost. God plan from Genesis 3 forward is to *replace* Adam’s Fallen race with a new race born from a New Adam (Romans 5:12-21; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) who would be revealed in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4).

Because we are all born in the image of the old man (Adam) and possess from birth his fallen nature, Jesus did not come in His first Incarnation to judge by the law that was already in

place. The Mosaic laws were given to modify sinful behaviors of fallen men and women and change them from the outside. Therefore, purpose of the law already in place when Jesus arrived on the scene was for the “behavior modification” of those who possessed Adam’s nature, but were in covenant relationship with God. Jesus understood that it was as much a part of fallen man’s nature to sin as it was for pigs to wallow in the mud. Therefore it would be of no use for him to condemn them than to condemn a pig for getting dirty (John 3:17); it is their nature. The law was given not to change the nature of the sin-stained and fallen race of Adam, but was given to expose the uncleanness of sinful man so he might at least know how to modify his behavior to imitate holiness. But the true righteousness – the “gold purified by fire” that makes someone clean from the inside – is something God alone can provide... but it comes with a cost. Salvation is indeed the “free gift of God” given to all who call upon His name, but purity, holiness, righteousness, truth, etc. come at a very high cost *“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.’ Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”* Hebrews 12:25-29

Before going any further with this study, it would be wise at this point to prayerfully examine your heart and ask yourself first “Am I ready to purchase some missing truth?” And second, “Am I willing to see salvation as being about something greater than myself?”

THE FIRST THING GOD LOST

The root of the deception of the Laodicean church is discovered when Adam and Eve were first deceived and bought Satan’s lie “...you shall not die,” the *Life* that was offered in the beginning was lost because man’s spirit died, separating him from God’s life-giving Spirit. What did God lose? When man’s spirit died, God lost His chosen dwelling place for His Spirit in His creation (Note John 3:5-8). The Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem were never intended to be God’s true or permanent dwelling place on the earth. They were at best

instructional tools – types and shadows of the eternal reality yet to come. Once Christ came, God would proclaim by His Spirit that He was “no longer looking for a house built by hands” (1 Corinthians 3:16) but was looking for a “bride” of living spirit and she would become the true dwelling place of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17). But until that time God has lost His Tabernacle – He lost His man in whom He intended to dwell.

“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” John 14:2-3

As John Brown expressed it, “Man lost the life for which he was created. God lost His dwelling place. God’s solution lies in exchanging the life of another to replace the life that Adam lost.”

*“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’... Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and **subdue it**; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”* Genesis 1:26 & 28

Man was created to rule.... To have dominion, which means to be the master of all life upon the earth and in the skies and in the seas. Man – male and female – was created in a unique way to be like his Maker. God blessed them and told them to reproduce and fill the earth and subdue it. But the instant he came out from under the reign of God his Creator, Man lost his authority to rule. Hidden in these verses is a subtle truth and another of those mysteries of God yet to be fully revealed. If indeed God created all things perfect and all things good (and this command is given before The Fall – before “weeds” and before the earth became contrary to Adam’s race) then what was there in the Garden and on the earth that needed to be subdued? From this verse of Scripture there seems to be something already in the garden and on the earth that was in rebellion and needed to be brought under control by Adam acting under the authority of His Lord.

Adam was created to reign and rule (to have dominion) over the earth and under God's authority; the instant that Adam and Eve considered whether or not it was good to eat of the fruit of the tree that God said was not meant for them (before they even reached out to take the fruit) the reign of God in Adam's heart was lost. Self-rule destroys God's rule – it can be only one or the other because mankind was not created to rival their creator. When they unwittingly joined the satanic rebellion and took over the Reign of what was right and wrong, it was over for them. Adam and Eve quickly discovered that it takes the reign of God in the heart of man to be Man as he was created to be. So Adam lost the reign of God in his heart; when that happened he lost the reign over himself and the reign over his own human community; he lost his reign over the earth. And because Adam lost the reign, all those who are born in the image and likeness of Adam, have lost the reign. And because Adam lost the reign, God lost the Reign. God lost the vessel he created – a vessel through which He intended to reign over the earth. The end result was the growing rebellion described as the Genesis story unfolds. Everything is out of order now and *“the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”* (1 John 5:19). The divine intention was (and still is) to rule over the earth through the man he had created.

“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.’” Revelation 21:2-3

The Reign of God in Christ in the heart of the disciple fulfills the purpose for which man was created in the first place. To live as a disciple means to prepare one's heart to be a fit habitation – a dwelling place for His life on the earth. The body of Christ is individually and corporately the Tabernacle where Christ begins to reestablish the Reign of God on the earth. The final chapters of Revelation reveal that this will reach its ultimate fulfillment at the end of the age when the Spirit of God reigns and rules over a new creation in a new heavens and new earth.

Therefore, the **normal** Christian life is to be the living, breathing, Tabernacle of God's Spirit on the earth. That means the disciple should live in such a way that wherever, the disciple is, HE IS. Galatians 2:20, *“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” is more than a figure of speech; it is the reality the disciple lives. And so the life of the disciple is laying down everything at the cross that is of the old life and pressing on towards the horizon where the New Jerusalem is waiting. The journey of the disciple then becomes daily learning to live out of the life of the Spirit – a life that is not their own. Jesus says to all those who will join Him on this way, “follow me and I will make you...” meaning that it is not in the “doing” of the disciple that the “making” comes – it is purely in the Spirit that the making happens. God promised Abram that if he would obey and follow him to a land that was not his own, God would “make him” into a great nation. In the same way the disciple is called to hear and obey the Lord’s commandments to follow Him so that He might “make him” a new creation in a heavenly habitation that is not his own. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). It is in the *following* that the Life as God intended it to be is discovered by the disciple. The disciple does not become by “doing”, but the “doing” comes out of becoming.

Genesis 3:8 says that God walked in the Garden in the cool of the day seeking to be with Adam. It is in the “being with” that becoming happens. Sin broke the fellowship with God and so we see Adam attempting to hide himself from his Creator. Apart from “being with” (abiding) there is no becoming; and without becoming, perfect obedience to all God commands (the reign of God) is impossible (John 15:10). Without the Reign of God in Christ in the heart of man, the purpose for which man was created in the first place remains unfulfilled.

THE SECOND THING GOD LOST

The second thing lost in the Garden was a love for the truth residing in the heart of man. Before The Fall, the truth of God resided in the heart of Adam and Eve. “God said...” and the seed of truth was planted in their hearts. It took something – or someone – outside of Adam to sow the lie into his heart. After The Fall, the lie was born into the sinful hearts of Adam’s race, and the truth of God had to be sown into the hearts of men – hearts that are not all equally prepared to receive the truth sown into them (Matthew 13:18-23). The foundational truth – the truth that was lost the day Adam and Eve fell and the truth the Laodicean church failed to see – is the truth that Jesus came to preach. And that truth is that it takes the reign of God in the heart of man for him to be normal (the man he was created to be). Through Christ’s atoning sacrifice the reign of God is now restored in His creation – in whosoever would believe (John 3:16). “The

rulers of this world are limited to governing by external means of control, but Christ's kingdom is unique in that it governs from within... Through this internal system of government, our lives can become uniquely choreographed by the Holy Spirit, synchronized with the plans of Heaven and coordinated with other members in the body of Christ." Bertram L. Gaines, *This Gospel of the Kingdom*, Destiny Image Publishers, © 1999, Pp. 16-17.

The Laodicean church was deceived just as Adam was deceived; and much of the church as a whole today is laboring under the same deception – the deception that some of the Reign of God belongs to man and some to God. The church as a whole is still ruling over itself; you can see that clearly in a number of contemporary issues, but in particular, the issue of tithes. Christians just about everywhere struggle over this issue of what belongs to them and what belongs to God. The truth be told, very few Christians tithe. They struggle because they believe it is a 90-10 proposition with the Lord. 90% belongs to us and 10% belongs to the Lord. But the truth is it is not a 90-10 proposition with the Lord; it is not even a 50-50 proposition; the truth is: it is a 100-0 proposition. 100% of everything belongs to God and zero percent is ours. And the lie that it is anything other than that in EVERY area of our lives explains why the church as a whole is still ruling over itself:

- In Vocations
- Where they live; What they drive
- How they spend their money
- How they use their time
- How they live
- In moral issues such as homosexuality, abortion, serving the poor, giving to missions, etc.
- In how little they read their Bibles and how little authority they give the Word of God in their lives.

All of the Christians' lives are in one way or another still under self-reign, which extends to what commands they will or will not obey. "Did God really mean what He said...?" "Does He really expect us to live that way?" "Isn't that legalistic... are we not under grace?" "I'm not perfect, just forgiven." And the modern-day Laodicean church wonders why they are miserable – seeming rich and feeling poor. They are plagued by the same problems, anxieties, fears, sicknesses, and sins as those on the outside. They proclaim that Jesus is the answer, but by their

lifestyles, they can't seem to find the answers for how to live the blessed life under the Reign promised in the word of God. And because the Laodicean church lost the Reign, God lost the Reign over His church. *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."* Revelation 3:19

Kingdom discipleship is the way to lead the rebellious heart back to the truth. It is in the abiding life of the disciple in relation to his Master that the disciple is made like his Master, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master..."* Matthew 10:24, 25_a. **Without the reign of God in the heart of a man, there can be no love for the truth residing in the heart of the man.** Without a love for the truth, deception will enter into the heart and self-rule will continue.

THE THIRD THING GOD LOST

"And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden." Genesis 3:8

After Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree the intimate relationship they shared with their Creator forever changed, and because of sin and shame, they attempted to hide themselves from their God. **So the third thing God lost was His intimate relationship with man.** The phrase "walking in the cool of the day" implies a familiarity and intimacy shared by close companions. Adam enjoyed a communion with his Creator that was intended to flow into all other relationships. As the crown of God's creation, the Reign of God in his heart would bring peace and harmony with nature. Living under God's Reign would allow Man to live in peace and harmony with one another and would give him an inner peace and security in his identity with God. All of this was dependent upon Adam's relationship with the Father; once deception entered into the heart of man, his intimacy with the Father was broken, and all would be turned to conflict and disharmony.

Mankind was not created for a long distance relationship with his Creator, but to this day most Christians still carry on as if they have a long distance relationship with God. They pray and ask God to "show up" in their church services, or they sing praises to "bring down the glory". Our prayers often ask God to "hear us." In many ways our words and actions sound as if

God was far off in heaven. The “with-ness” or intimacy God desires to have with His people still suffers from the consequences of The Fall. It is this *abiding with* – walking with, and being in intimacy with God – that the life of discipleship is intended to restore. The intimacy in the Garden that God intended to have with his man would lead Adam and Eve to the tree of life that the Creator had intended for them to enjoy. But the story of The Fall ends with Adam and Eve hiding from God and away from the tree of life.

Apart from the intimacy of abiding in God’s presence, Adam and his descendants lost what it meant to live a “normal” life in the sense God intended. Jesus came and preached the love for the truth that was lost in the Garden, but was to be found once again in the Incarnation. In all that He did and all that He said, Jesus was showing that it takes the reign of God in the heart of man to be a normal human being created in the image and likeness of their Creator. The normal life Jesus revealed to His disciples is overflowing with the Spirit and the Life; it is rich with heavenly treasures, and enables the disciple to experience an abundant and fruitful spiritual life – “God life.” The truth Jesus sowed into the hearts of men was intended to show the way to that life to all who had ears to hear and eyes to see. The great deception is that this other life that Jesus modeled is only the ideal – a target to shoot for, but no one truly expects to hit consistently. Jesus came to draw all men to Himself. He came to call all who were willing to obey His command to follow Him as true disciples so that He could “make them” into a new creation.

Kingdom discipleship is nothing less than a call to die to the old so that something new can be done in the life of the disciple. The Laodicean church labored under the deception that believing in Jesus made them disciples, and nothing more was required of them. Most of what is taught in “discipleship class” is to learn all you can *about* Jesus and the church doctrines; it is taught as community responsibility to help those less fortunate; how to pray, tithe, serve as ushers, deacons, etc. Some even take it a step further and teach discipleship as learning WWJD (what would Jesus do?) and then going out to do it. They believe that somehow if Christians will just do all they can in service to others then maybe, someday they will behave more like Jesus in other areas of their life. But none of that is anywhere near what Jesus taught was discipleship.

When Jesus called His disciples, He made it clear to them that He was calling them to a radical lifestyle of following the master wherever He led. Jesus said in essence, “be with me and I will make you...” That is the way of the disciple. A disciple leaves everything behind; they leave their mother, father, sisters, brothers, etc. They leave all their earthly possessions behind

and they go where the Master goes; they eat what the Master eats; they sleep where the Master sleeps; they do everything the Master does, and He pours His teachings into them and in time they *become* everything He *is* from being with Him. And once their training is complete, the life of the disciple becomes one with the Master.

The Laodicean church is filled with believers who have never been disciples; they are deceived because they have never been led on the way of walking in intimacy with Jesus. But it is only in the *being* and *abiding* in Jesus that He is able to “make” disciples like Him. It is this “making” or “transforming” into being like God in Christ that was lost in the Garden and it is that condition that kingdom discipleship addresses.

Adam lost:

- The Life of the Spirit of God in him
- The Truth of the Reign of God in him
- The Way of intimacy with his Creator in him

God lost:

- The Life: His living Tabernacle in the hearts of men
- The Truth: His Reign within the hearts of men and over the earth
- The Way: His intimate relationship with those created in His image

Kingdom discipleship is God in Christ through His Spirit restoring that which He lost when Adam fell.

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Romans 5:10

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are

ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 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...” Colossians 1:19-22

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 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 (NKJV)

THE ENEMY’S THREE GREAT DECEPTIONS

The way of kingdom 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. If in fact the Laodicean church is the model for the 21st century church, 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” but has no power to save us “to.” 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, before Mount Sinai, the Wilderness Wanderings, etc. – were given as examples for the church to warn us not to repeat the same mistakes. *“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 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, were laid low in the Wilderness, and never entered 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 their commitment to God and His word, 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 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 pressing on daily being sanctified TO the Promised Life (glorification) that 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 and begins to walk 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” 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 them to have. Christians cannot make it as a disciple apart from living out of this other life that is not their own (a life lived out of the Holy Spirit). A disciple is more than an imitation of what Jesus would do; Kingdom Discipleship is living out of and obeying what Jesus *will* do and *is* doing in and through them on a daily basis. The former way is based upon an ability to successfully imitate Jesus’ life; the other depends upon the Life of “Christ in us” doing it all. If HE is not *being and doing* in His disciples, it’s an imitation life – a counterfeit - and is inadequate to take them all the way to God’s rest (glory). “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

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 then was the gospel Jesus had been preaching, 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. 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. *The Laodiceans were deceived into thinking there is life in Christ apart from an unwillingness 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 and there is no access to this other life – the life of “Christ within, the hope and glory” which is the narrow way that being a disciple is intended to lead us to.

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 purposes, 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.” The way of kingdom discipleship is *not* the Life, but is the way the disciple prepares him or herself 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

A FINAL NOTE FOR MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN INDIA

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 21st century is on the brink of enormous economic, social, and spiritual upheavals. More Christians than ever before believe we are in the beginning throes of the biblical Last Days. In the opening paragraph of his book *Implosion*, New York Times bestselling author Joel C. Rosenberg wrote: “Is it possible that the American economy – and more broadly American society in general – is not simply facing serious challenges or a season of decline? Could America actually collapse in the not-too-distant future if serious, fundamental, and sweeping changes are not made soon? Once, such a question would have struck most Americans as ludicrous – even offensive. But times have changed.” © 2012, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Ill., p.1. The same can be said of India. The economic, social, and spiritual fabric of the nation is being stretched to the limit. Tremendous internal forces of class and caste warfare, political turmoil, systemic corruption, overburdened infrastructures, globalization, and modernization may end up tearing the nation apart – especially if India’s economy is caught up in the collapse of the world’s reserve currency: the U.S. dollar.

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, maybe more than ever since the

church was birthed on the day of Pentecost, Christians need to stop fooling themselves, see the collapsing world around them, and get serious about who in this world they are in Christ. Indian pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, etc. can no longer afford to follow the Western model of a bankrupt Christian religion that attempts 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 so the process can continue week after week without any purpose or meaning 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. Again, I must emphasize that the way of discipleship is not the *Life*, it is the way that 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 in the heart of that disciple and establish the Reign that was lost so long ago in the Garden.

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 – those whose hearts long for this other LIFE – my hope and prayer is that this study guide will be just as it says... a study to guide them along the way **to** discover the LIFE they have been longing for.

BEING A DISCIPLE

INTRODUCTION

Advancing Christianity in India

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 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 and ignited a missionary zeal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that propelled the Gospel message around the world has all but gone out. In America, the passion of the 2nd Great Awakening has 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 his or herself 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 one 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. 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.”

The obvious question to ask at this point in time is “what was Jesus like?” 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.”

“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 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 fast approaches.

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 of His Spirit. And 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, they must never end up devaluing own faith and eroding confidence in the absoluteness of the truth they 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 India is going to become a majority Christian nation, then the church leaders in India 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 this study guide is all about: defining what true discipleship is; what are the Lord's terms for being His disciple; and teaching others how to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

*Introduction to the Key Parable of
“The Sower and the Soils”*

1. LESSON ONE: NOT FOR
EVERYONE

Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?’

Mark 4:13.

JESUS USED THE PARABLE OF “THE SOWER & SOILS” FROM MATTHEW 13:1-23 TO ILLUSTRATE WHO IS TRULY 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, now His teaching ministry shifts and most of His public sermons are in parables. So the natural reaction of His disciples is to ask “Why parables now?”

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God...”

Colossians 1:9, 10

Read Matthew 13:11-17. What was Jesus' answer to His disciples? _____

Jesus told His disciples that the mysteries of the kingdom that He was teaching were not for the multitudes, but were for His disciples only. 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. **Read John 6:26, 27. Why were the masses following Jesus?** _

The Gospels reveal that 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. So 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

"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

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).

A time would come after His resurrection when Jesus would command His disciples to go into the entire world and preach the Good News, 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. **Read Jeremiah**

31:27, 28; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 10:9 & Matthew 13:37.

Who is the sower referred to in this parable? _____

The 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*

“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,

of what is Mine,” Jesus said, “and declare it to you” (John 16:14).

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.

Read 1 Peter 1:23-25; 2 Corinthians 9:10, 11; and Colossians 1:3-6. What do these verses tell us is the purpose for the seed? _____

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. Disciples shamelessly and liberally sow into the hearts of men the imperishable Word of *the*

“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

Isaiah 55:10, 11

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.

THE SOILS

Read Matthew 13:3-9. Identify the four soils mentioned in this parable.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Read Matthew 13:18-23. Using Jesus’ explanations of the soils, what does this parable of the sower tell you about the responses of those who have the gospel of the kingdom preached to them? _____

Each of the four soils in this parable has different characteristics that affect their ability to receive the seed sown into them. **Read verse 13 of parable. Where is**

“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 seed of the word sown? _____

What can you conclude about what the soils represent? _____

Does this parable tell us that all people are equally ready to receive the word of God into their hearts? _____

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 converted...”? 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 is 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

“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

all for them. There is little if any talk of the cost of becoming a Christian and what it means to follow Him.

NOTE: for some who live in certain areas of the world – or who come from certain religious backgrounds there certainly is RISK involved. 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, and in some places 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).

Read Matthew 8:18-22; 13:2; 19:21-25; Luke 14:25-33; and John 6:25-27; 6:60-66. Compare them with Matthew 13:19. What does the Parable of the “Sower and the Soils” teach us about “Wayside” believers?

“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 understand this parable, 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 His time was limited, and He needed to intensify His teachings on the kingdom of God. There were 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 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 the truth because they were not ready to receive certain truths – truths that their hearts were too hard, too stony, or too

Titus 2:11-15 (NIV)

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke

thorny to receive. **Read Romans 8:5-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Colossians 2:16-19.** What is the condition of those who are “carnal” Christians? _____

Those who are “wayside Christians” are unable to receive the word of God because they are not 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 and 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 intend to obey the word of God, it will remain on the surface and the enemy will quickly snatch away the truth before it has a chance to take root in their hearts. That is why those who are on the wayside are still under the control of their old sinful selves, 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” but are in name only because their hearts are not devoted to worshiping God in spirit and truth.

The Key Parable of “The Sower and the Soils” – The Stony Places

2. LESSON TWO: 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 a life of health, wealth, and prosperity in this life 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 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

“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

inadequate Gospel. An inadequate Gospel message is one that

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

Evangelists that present a gospel that only promises the blessings without counting the costs of following Jesus may be sincere, but regardless of their sincerity, they are still presenting a totally inadequate picture of what it means to become a disciple. Once the multitudes are brought into the church with promises of God's unending and unconditional blessings do the pastors and other church leaders continue week after week preaching the same inadequate gospel message of salvation without any cost to those who call upon the Lord? Or do they begin preaching about the high, high cost of being a follower of Jesus? Either way, if the new converts have been brought into the church believing in inadequate gospel, they may begin to think they have been deceived. As the hearers gradually 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 are saved, they will begin to question if God is really able to do all that was promised them. Or once the new converts hear the demands of discipleship, they might decide there is too much cost and will seek a better, less

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...”

demanding way of salvation than the way of the cross all disciples must follow. **Read Matthew 13:20, 21. Write in your own words what happens to the seed in the rocky soil and why.** _____

Read Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26. What happens to the heart described in these verses 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 and 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 survive and grow. The plow does the work and cuts open the surface of the soil; it exposes what is hidden below

“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

the surface, but it is up to the farmer to remove the rocks from the soil if he wants to have an abundant crop.

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 these rocky places are:

- strongholds
- stubbornness
- self-will
- “besetting sins”
- anger, hatred,
- bitterness,
- unforgiveness,
- jealousy, envy, etc.

Rocks are strongholds in the disciple’s heart; if they are left alone they 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. **Read Isaiah 31:9; Jeremiah 4:4; Revelation 16:7, 8; and Ecclesiastes 4:1-3. Think about how God’s judgment and oppression from enemies cause spiritual strongholds to be exposed.**

Isaiah 8:13-15

“The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; *Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.* He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.”

Stony places in the soil represent unsundered places in the heart of a disciple. The Lord uses both judgment and persecution to expose those unsundered 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. 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 stronghold, the faith of these disciples will wither and die out so they will never reach maturity in Christ.

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 may affect 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. Two of Jesus’

**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”

disciples stand out in particular as examples of those whose stony hearts had to be dealt with by the Master Discippler. **Review and reflect upon the Gospel stories that describe Peter and Judas. On a separate sheet of paper, write your observations about those strongholds Jesus exposed and forced them to confront. In your reflections, note how Judas did not deal with his strongholds and what was the result; also note how Peter dealt with his strongholds and what was the result for him.**

When they first come to Jesus, all disciples to one degree or another have strongholds in their hearts that are the result of sinful habits and lifestyles. As the disciple begins to walk and live in close proximity to the Lord, the Holy Spirit will begin to expose them. Every disciple has a choice at that crop, so too the disciple must remove those stony places in the heart the Holy Spirit exposes and not try to bury them and pretend they do not exist. 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 of wilderness experiences to expose the true character of the disciples’ heart. **Besides Peter and Judas, can you think of some other examples of characters from the Scriptures that are examples of those who did or did not remove the stones from their heart? _____**

Luke 5:8-11

“When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.’ So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.”

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.”

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

Genesis 3:8

“And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.”

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

Emotionally: withdrawn, uncaring, callous, and uncommitted

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

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.

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

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. ____**

2. 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.” Christians – of all

“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

the Christlike thing to do. How well did you imitate Christ in that situation?

4. 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.” **Read Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 7:27-36.**

What practical instructions does Jesus give for this principle? _____

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. Describe Paul’s instructions for this principle. _____

Proverbs 25:21-22

“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you.”

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown

Notes for Verses 21,22

Verses 21, 22 (Compare Mt 5:44 Ro 12:20). As metals are melted by heaping coals upon them, so is the heart softened by kindness.

5. Honoring Others Above Self – “...there is a brand of brokenness that esteems others better than one’s self (Philippians 2:3).” **Read Matthew 18:1-4; and Mark 10:44-45. How do those verses compare with Philippians 2:3?** _____

6. Prompt Obedience – “God wants us to be broken in accepting and obeying His will.” The calling 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

Read Matthew 12:46-50. How did Jesus describe the relationship He shared with His disciples?

Upon what basis is being a disciple of Jesus determined? _____

“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*,

“...disciples are being made in the same way they have always been made – by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the church. It is when people of God engage in the mission of God through the Spirit of God.” Ed Stetzer

Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, CO, © 2010, pp. 103-104.

7. Death To Public Opinion – “...we need to be brought to a place where we are dead to the world’s applause or frowns.” **Read John 1:10, 11; 3:19-21; 15:18-25.** **What did Jesus teach His disciples to expect to be the world’s reception of them?** _____

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.

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

Colossians 1:24-27 (NIV)

“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

in those lonely moments – only to discover that those footprints were Jesus’ not his because at that moment when he could not go on, 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

1 John 1:7

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

8. Confessing Others' Sins As Our Own – “We need to be so broken that we confess the sins of God’s people as our own.” **Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. What is the relationship of the disciple with the church and does that differ from their relationship with Christ?**

A disciple cannot help but identify himself or herself so closely with the other members of the body of Christ that their sins become his or her sins. **Read John 17:20-23 and Isaiah 53:4-6. How do these verses remind the disciple to be like Jesus, the One who “took our sins and sorrows and made them his very own”?** _____

9. Keeping One’s Cool In The Crisis – “The final aspect of brokenness involves poise and equanimity in the crises of life.” **Read Luke 8:22-25; Matthew**

“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

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

John 15:8-12

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

⁹“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. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

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 husbands astray and caused 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).

The Key Parable of “The Sower and the Soils” – The Thorny Soil

3. LESSON THREE: THE THORNS

“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 are snatched away and never take root. Then there are the seeds sown in the rock. 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.

“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

These Christians are those 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. Or when persecution comes, they will decide the risk is just too great and they will go back to their old religion 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 a spiritual life rooted and grounded deep into a willing heart where living waters of Christ will refresh and nourish them even when the heat of persecution comes upon them:

Psalm 1:1-6

“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

“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 – sharply 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. 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 your 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.

Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

Read Luke 13:6-9. Describe this story in your own words. Did the master have the right to expect fruit from this tree? Did the master demand immediate fruit? _____

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 Lord has every right to expect fruit to be produced by His disciples. However, because of His grace and mercy, He gives His 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 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. **Read John 15:1-5; 16:5-15. Describe the work of the Father, the Son, and the**

**Proverbs 12:11
(ESV)**

“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.”

**Proverbs 12:14
(ESV)**

“From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man’s hand comes back to him.”

Holy Spirit in the heart of the disciple. _____

The call to discipleship begins with God’s grace: “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 disciples Jesus called, the children of Abraham by faith who are called as disciples must participate in that call and 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.

Read Luke 9:57-62. Although each of these men who wanted to follow Jesus had different issues, what was the one common issue that prevented them from following Jesus? _____

The truth is, there are no half-measures with Jesus. Yes, thank God, that salvation is the free gift of His

“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 that 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

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. “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 the 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.

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). **Read Romans 12:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:19, 20. For what purpose does the Holy Spirit reside in the heart of the disciple? _____**

For the disciple, Salvation must be more than forgiveness of sins; it must lead them to whole life

Philippians 3:7-11

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may 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; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

transformation – 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.

Read 1 Kings 19:19-21. Describe Elisha's actions when called by Elijah. _____

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 leaves everything 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.

John 1:36-39

“And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’

The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ They said to Him, ‘Rabbi’ (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), ‘where are You staying?’

³⁹ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).”

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 makes other disciples 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. 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

Jude 1:20-23

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”

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" (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, 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 his or her 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.

Read Matthew 19:23-26; and Luke 12:13-34.
What do you conclude about the priority of gaining wealth for the disciple? _____

"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 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 became a more popular meeting place on Sunday mornings than the local church. Eventually, social scientists began to ask if consumerism had become the new religion of the twenty-first century. Peter Maiden in his book, *Discipleship*, wrote excellent chapters on the relationship between the disciple and money and sex.

Money, Sex, and Power are “The Big Three” arenas where the disciple’s faith and loyalty to Jesus is constantly tried, tested and proven. **Read Acts 5:1-11; Acts 8:9-24; and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. What were the issues being contended with in these disciples? ___**

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”

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

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. **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?**

Jesus was perfect and blameless in each of these areas of money, sex, and power. He understood their value and necessity to living 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,

“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

“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 NIV *“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.”*

Read 1 Kings 10:14-29. Consider Solomon’s great wealth. By the world’s standards would Solomon be considered a successful king? Read 1 Kings 11:1-8. By the Lord’s standards would Solomon be considered a successful king? _____

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).

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 to their own benefit, and for the benefits of others as God intended as His divine purpose for giving them those blessings in the first place. **Read 1 Timothy 6:4_b-5, 17-19; and James 2:1-13. What will be the godly attitude of heart of the disciple who has truly let go of the desire for riches in this world? What will be the condition of the thorny heart?** _____

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.*” **Read Philippians 4:12-13. Describe how you can tell if a disciple's heart is free**

“... 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

of the thorns. _____

DISCIPLES HONOR THE LORD WITH THEIR WEALTH

Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV)
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.

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 our 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 (or principles) found in the Bible that will enable the disciple to live “thorn free” and Honor the Lord with their wealth as He intends.

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

Read Proverbs 3:9-10. In your own words how does it express 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.

Psalms 24:1-2 NIV

“The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.”

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. **Read Proverbs 14:31 and 11:24-25. In your own words express how these verses support this principle.** _____

The logic of giving as part of wealth-building can only be 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.

Matthew 19:21-22
(NIV)
“Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 3:27-28; 28:27; 21:13; 22:22-23; and 14:21; 19:17. What do these Scriptures teach about how and why God’s people should give to the poor and needy. _____

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

“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

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. **Read Luke 6:38 and Matthew 6:1-4. How does the giving of Jesus’ disciples differ from the giving of those of this world?** _____

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.

Read 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. What do these verses reveal about the preaching of the gospel? _

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? As it is written:

‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’”

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 – His faithful servants that He knows He can trust 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*

“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

does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”

Read 2 Corinthians chapter nine. What are the principles of kingdom giving Paul describes in this passage? _____

If you give little, you will get little in return. 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 understand 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

“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

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.

Reread verse 11 of this passage. What are the two who need them, those in need will break out into thanksgiving and praise to God for helping them. Therefore, when disciples free themselves from the entanglement 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 causes these two things to happen: (1) those in need are helped, and (2) they overflow with thanks to God – therefore, God gets the glory when Christians give.

Reread 9:13. Who gets the glory when disciples give?

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. **Read**

2 Corinthians 9:13
NIV

“Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.”

Mark 9:41; Luke 21:1-4. What do these verses tell us about the importance of the value of the gift?

“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

In prosperous nations like America, all the cares and worries that come with the pursuit and attainment of riches deceives and distracts disciples from reaching maturity. The comforts, contentment, and self-gratification that come from being well-fed, over-entertained, and insulated from persecutions overshadow the good seed of the kingdom and prevent these disciples from pressing on to the higher calling of Christ Jesus. They may go to church every Sunday and learn their lessons well; they may be active in their church – even serving on the board or serving as greeters and ushers – but they have stopped growing. They have reached a certain level, but can go no farther until they take the axe to the roots of the thorns that encompass their lives. They are able to give 10% at best, but the word of the kingdom that demands 100% is lost to them.

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

“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

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?”

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.

The fact that God is owner of everything does not mean the disciple can never use any of the things God gives for their personal needs or enjoyment. Paul was clear when he wrote that it is God “who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). But it does mean that every major decision the disciple makes about money should be reverently placed before the Lord and ask Him if it is truly His will for them to spend it for that particular use. “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

1 Timothy 6:17-19

“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. *Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

are no longer live for ourselves: death has taken place
and we live now for him.” Peter Maiden

The Key Parable of “The Sower and the Soils” – The Good Soil

4. LESSON FOUR:
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

Read Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33; 21:19; and Luke 13:6-

7. What is the Lord’s expectation concerning fruit and fruit-bearing for His disciples? _____

Following the progression of the parable of “The Sower and the Soils” the good soil is not only fertile, but 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

Luke 3:7-9

“Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as *our* father.” For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

good tree will produce good fruit, and by their fruits you will know who are 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. Producing a good harvest requires three things:

(1) Good (fertile) soil = a heart "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) The good soil must then be properly 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 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 = the disciple must participate in the process by preparing their heart as a "habitation" for the Lord. The self must be broken (denied) by being plowed up (exposed) by the

John 15:5

"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."

double-edged sword of the Spirit. All those hidden strongholds – those hard places in the heart that resist the word of the kingdom – must be dealt with and removed by the disciple. The worldly pleasures and material comforts that choke the word of self-sacrifice and self-denial, and will prevent the disciple from pressing on to reach maturity must be cut back and rooted out. Here is where another of the great mysteries of the kingdom is found: the cutting and pruning, which is called *sanctification*.

(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).

However, His disciples know that the cross is not the final destination. Jesus rose from the dead and because He lives, whoever follows Him will also live.

*“Gradually, though
sadly still
inconsistently, I believe
I am growing in the
experience of seeing life,
through the eyes of
Jesus” Peter Maiden*

into the face of every person born on this earth. What is being said here is that the cross is not the *end* of the story. There is more – much, much more beyond the cross. 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 that is the rest of the gospel – the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached for three and one half years before the three-day work of the cross was enacted.

If the events of the three-day work of Christ upon the cross, in the tomb, and on the day of resurrection, were the totality of the gospel, then it would make man and his salvation the center of the universe – then everything from Genesis 1:1 onwards becomes only about mankind’s salvation. When the life beyond the resurrection is factored in, then the focus of the gospel shifts from mankind at the center to God at the center. Salvation is for HIS glory. It involves what came before Genesis 1:1 and extends through the entire Scripture and looks beyond the final “Amen” of Revelation 22:21.

HOW WE GLORIFY GOD

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

“...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

who never left the master. Discipleship always has the end goal in mind – that end being for the disciple to complete their training and become so like the master that others could not distinguish disciple from master.

The same is true for disciples of Jesus today. As the disciple spends

- Time with Jesus
- Time with his word
- Time 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. That means the impact of true discipleship upon the disciple’s lifestyle must be absolutely radical and counter to every human effort of “trying to live for Jesus” out of their own strength. A quick study of the Master Jesus with His disciple Peter illustrates this principle of kingdom discipleship.

Read Matthew 4:18-20; 15:15; 16:15-19; Mark 10:28; Luke 8:51-55; 24:33; John 21:15-19; Acts 1:12-14 and 9:39-42. How do these passages of Scripture demonstrate the discipleship process between Jesus and Peter? _____

As we examine the life of Jesus in the Gospels, we realize that His life was so radically different from all the people around Him that it became utterly unacceptable to the secular authorities and to His Jewish brethren, which is what motivated them to want to get rid of Him...

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.” So when Jesus says “come follow me”, the disciple responds not out of compulsion, but will willingly leave 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, Jesus 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 slips away into a life of license fueled by the delusion of a “cheap grace” that says God loves the sinner in spite of their lifestyle of sin. In the following chapters we will begin to examine the terms of discipleship that Jesus taught:

1 John 4:16

“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.”

- Obedience to the Lordship of Christ, Our #1 Love
- Counting the Cost
- Knowing What to Expect
- Denial of Self
- A Fervent Love for the Brethren
- Forsaking All
- Abiding in Christ
- Fear Not: Abandoning Oneself to Christ

Read Matthew 22:36-40. Compare with Deuteronomy 6:4-6, Leviticus 19:18 and John 13:34,
35. What is it that makes love so essential to the life of a disciple? _____

Love is what makes the heart of the disciple “good soil” able to receive and retain the seed of the gospel sown into it. It is love that enables the disciple to forsake all and persevere through the trials and hardships of this life and press on to the high calling of God in Christ.

Read Philippians 3:3-13; 2 Corinthians 11:22-33.
Is the life of the disciple supposed to be a life of comfort and ease? _____

Acts 26:24-26

“Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’”

But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.’”

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 a hardship – the price will be too high. **Read John 15:18-25. What did Jesus warn His disciples to expect?** _____

Of course, even when motivated by love, there will be hard times – times of disappointment – times when we will suffer in this world because we have chosen to walk in the footsteps of our Master. Jesus warned us that the world hated Him and would no doubt hate all those who followed Him. But when our motives are right, we will understand that being a disciple of Jesus is a privilege. It is an offer, not a demand.

Our service to the Lord only gets too hard when our motives and priorities get off track – when we see

"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 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 to earn a living. 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. **Read Mark 9:38-40; and Matthew 20:20-28. How did Jesus answer this issue when it came up with His disciples? _____**

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. Jesus bought us by paying the ultimate price. So for us to love him and serve him with everything we have is not heroic or extraordinary; it should be the **normal** response of a person who understands more and more who Jesus is and appreciates more and 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. But those who are looking for a savior from everything that is painful or unpleasant in this life,

"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

will be disappointed. The fact is that there are no guarantees of an easy road simply by following in Jesus' footsteps.

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). **Read 2 Peter 3:11-13. What did Peter say was the way God's people should be? And what should they be looking for?** _____

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

Romans 5:1-5

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

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. **Read 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. How do these passages reinforce the call to holy living in the life of the disciple? _____**

Discipleship is 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 self-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", born in the image and likeness of God, from manifesting in the life of the disciple.

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 work of perfecting His disciples.

God does the work of transformation in the heart of the disciple; the disciple for his/her 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 this of Christ). Apart from a good heart, given/surrendered to Christ, it is impossible for the disciple to control his/her 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

"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, and absolutely certain future, which will be both a great motivation and comfort." Peter Maiden

“according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began...”

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 still 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: “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).

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 they meditate upon the meaning of the Parable of the Sower and the Soils, disciples 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 and/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 worldly, 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.

Entering In:
The Terms of Discipleship

5. LESSON FIVE

COUNTING THE COST

- 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

Lessons Five and Six will cover *The Seven Terms of Discipleship* Jesus said were necessary for all who would be one of His disciples. These terms are found in several key passages from the Gospels: **Read Matthew 16:24-25; Luke 9:57-62, 14:25-33; John 8:31, 13:34-35, and 15:8.** Are these terms of discipleship only for a few “fanatical” or dedicated followers of Jesus? Or did He expect everyone who followed Him to accept these terms? _____

When the disciple carefully examines these passages, they will discover words like, “anyone”, “whoever”, and “no one.” All of these terms are intended to

“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

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.

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). **Read Ephesians 5:25-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:20; and John 13:34. How do you reconcile these verses with Luke 14:26?** _____

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 of anything that would cause us to sin. Luke 14:26 is

2 Thessalonians
1:3-4 (NIV)

“We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.”

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.” (p. 6). 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

1 Corinthians 1:18

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The disciple's commitment and submission is motivated by looking back on the cross and realizing the price Jesus paid in love so that they might be totally accepted by God – not on the basis of performance, but through their position as God's most beloved son or daughter. For the disciple, the cross of Christ was intended to do more than free them from sin and death; it was 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. **Read Matthew 10:37-39; Galatians 2:20; 6:14; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7. Do disciples suffer for the sake of suffering? Or is there a larger goal in mind concerning the Cross? (Note also Hebrews 12:1-3).**

“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

Far from being the means to a perpetual self-martyrdom, for the disciple the cross of Christ is the great reward of kingdom discipleship. 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.

Matthew 16:21-23
(NIV)

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’

Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’”

A Life Spent Following Christ. Matthew 16:25 is more than a call to take up the cross; it is also a call to follow. **Read Luke 9:57-62. In each case, who did the asking? What is the common factor in why each of these people could not answer the call to follow? _**

Luke 9:57-62 describes a quick succession of brief encounters with those looking to follow Jesus. 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

**1 Corinthians
13:4-8a, 13 (NIV)**

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails...

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

5:22, 23). In order to be His disciples, we must walk as He walked. We must exhibit the fruit of Christ-likeness (John15:8).” William MacDonald, True Discipleship, Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, KS, © 1975, pp.7-8

A Fervent Love for All Who Belong to Christ.

Jesus said in John 13:34-35 (NKJV), “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.” **Read 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. Considering the number of times this command is given, how important is it for the disciples to love one another?**

Why is it so important? _____

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*

1 Timothy 3:14-15

“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

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.

Read Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19. What is the relationship between Christ and His body? How does the unity of the Body, the church affect that relationship? _____

Christ alone is the head of His body, the church, by virtue of His entering into communion corporeally with the new nature. 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 the same thing in essence: the proof of kingdom discipleship is to endure, remain, stay, or be steadfast in the word of God.

Review Matthew 13:18-23 – the meaning of the parable of the “Sower and the Soils.” Think about the progression of the parable and note how those

1 John 3:10-11

“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...”

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. What does the phrase “abide or continue in My word” mean to you? _____

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. 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 –

“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

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. **Read Matthew 15:3-6. What is Corban and why did Jesus single out this tradition as being hypocritical and contrary to spirit and intent of the law?**_____

Corban or *korban*; translated "a gift," "a sacrificial offering," literally, "that which is brought near," namely, to the altar). In the course of time it became associated with an objectionable practice. Anything dedicated to the temple by pronouncing the votive word "Corban" forthwith belonged to the temple, but only ideally; actually it might remain 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 his property or a part of it as a gift to the temple, that is, as "Corban" There was no necessity of fulfilling his vow, yet he was actually prohibited from ever using his property for the support of his parents.

From: *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

Read Matthew 6:25-33; 7:9-10; 27:57; Luke 12:13-34.

Was Jesus opposed to any of His disciples having wealth? What was Jesus objection to wealth? ____

A closer look at the Gospels will reveal that Jesus was not opposed to people having wealth or possessions. Joseph of Arimathema, and Lazarus and his sisters are a few of many examples of disciples who had houses, and other material wealth. 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

"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

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.)

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

Philippians 4:18-19

“Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

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 in our life that are necessary... not those things that the consumer oriented markets 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

Matthew 6:25-30

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?

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 himself or herself, 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

Philippians 1:3-6

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ...”

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 judge us in the end NOT by what were the expectations of others, nor by what we strived for in our own strengths, but by what in us is truly of Him – that which brought into being by the Lord himself who will bring our transformation to completion according to His good pleasure, and to accomplish His purposes in creation.

*Entering In:
Dying To Self*

6. LESSON SIX:

DYING TO SELF – THE AGAPE ROAD

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

Walking in Agape: the key to living the Christian life is very simple: the disciple must emphasize love and make 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

Mark 10:21

“Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’”

possible for the disciple. 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 will quickly dissipate
- The cost of following Jesus will be too high
- Dying to self is impossible
- Obtaining money, possessions, and power will quickly take priority over seeking first the kingdom of God
- The commandment of Jesus that His disciples love each other and remain united in Him will be impossible.

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 from others; they are strangers, meeting at the same communion table, but having 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 one with another is central to our truly being His disciples: **John 17:20-23 (NIV)** *“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.”*

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

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Romans 15:1-7 (NIV)

*“We who are strong ought to **bear with** the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should **please his neighbor** for his good, to build him up. **For even Christ did not please himself** but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” **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.** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of **unity** among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with **one heart and mouth** you may **glorify** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.***

4. _____

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-

"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

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.*”

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 brings attention to themselves. **Read Matthew 6:1-8, and 16-18. Was Jesus opposed to “doing acts of righteousness” like giving to the poor, prayer and fasting? What did Jesus criticize? _____**

A disciple will never be able to 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 legislate 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 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)

*“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 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

“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

Because *Agape* is the motive for everything Christians say and do, the ETHIC of Christianity must also be love. Love must define and shape the moral guidelines for the church. **Read John 14:15, 21-24; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:21-24; and 5:1-3. What is the relationship between love and obedience in the life of the disciple?** _____

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 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 – loosening the morals based upon God’s unchanging standards. 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. It is when *Agape* is not present in the church as a whole that a nation “jumps the rails” of godly principles that define every human relationship to:

- God
- Family and marriage
- With others in the church (brothers and sisters)
- With those outside of the church

Read Romans 5:19; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 10:10; and 13:11-12. What is it that makes a disciple holy, righteous, or sanctified? _____

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

“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

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 for them.

If we do not understand this dynamic of our faith, we will never understand what our life in Christ is all 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:

- reflects the Christlike character of holiness, and
- reflects 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

"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

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 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. **Read John 15:6-7; and Luke 13:6-9. What is the Lord's expectation for His disciples concerning fruitfulness?** _____

"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.

Read Luke 7:36-50; 18:9-14; and Matthew 23:1-7. For what reason did Jesus challenge the Pharisees? _____

John 17:24-26 (NIV)

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

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 a unadulterated relationship of *Agape* where everything becomes about Him – it is all for His glory.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-7; Hebrews 3:7-14; James 1:2-3; and 1 Peter 1:6-7. Review the heart conditions revealed in the parable of “The Sower and the Soils.” Why is it so important for the disciple to remove anything from their heart that will keep them from reaching their full potential in Christ? _____

Sooner or later the Lord will put every disciple to the test – a test that will reveal his or her true nature and character. It is not a “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

“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

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 says, *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you 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 your 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 or 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 anyone whose heart is not prepared and ready 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

"It is God's unconditional love that draws us to Him, and it is our unconditional love toward others in His name that will draw others to Him. He wants us to love people in His place and do it the same way He would if He were here in bodily form. He wants us to live the Love Revolution." Joyce Meyer

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."

THE SEVEN THINGS WE MUST DIE TO

Luke 14:25-33

“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.”

When the time comes for pastor or evangelist to make his final appeal to anyone 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... will do everything for them for the asking... and all they have to do is say a little prayer and be saved.

“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 disciplined 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 the strongholds; or will become so entangled in worldly pursuits that they will never reach a level of maturity in Christ that will produce the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. **Review the terms of discipleship covered so far.**

- A supreme love for Jesus Christ
- A deliberate choosing of the cross
- A life spent in following Christ
- A fervent love for all who belong to Christ
- An unswerving continuance in His Word
- Forsaking of all to follow Him

To all of above add: *Dying to self* and our salvation in Christ shifts dramatically off of ourselves and what Christ can do for us (expressed as *Eros* or self-referential love) and becomes all about denying our own self in order to glorify God. Not one of the terms of discipleship listed above is possible to achieve apart from *dying to self*. None, including dying to self, are possible to

"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

their life on the cross and follow Him. 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 themselves from sinning. 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; it is leaving Egypt and crossing over the Red Sea; or leaving the Wilderness and crossing over the Jordan into the Promised Land. But that 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 before the Promised Land and refused

“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

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.”*

Because the first generation 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.

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. **Read 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.**

“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

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:

1. Look Good
2. Feel God
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. 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

Disciples are made not born...

Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you...”

Both leaders and church members (the discipler and those being disciplined) are all being disciplined by the “Master.” Every disciple must

intentionally be a part of the “making” by allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work of transformation in them.

water” (this *other life* of the Spirit of the living God) into the heart of the disciple.

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 to make them more tolerable for a larger audience, it may make it easier and less threatening to some, but in the end it will 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. **Read Matthew 16:22-23; Mark 3:20-22; Luke 4:28-30; John 18:15-20. What should be the expectation of those who are willing to forsake all to follow Christ? _____**

Luke 21:34-36 and Philippians 3:12. 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 ready to press onward on the journey to transformation.

"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

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

Read Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21; John 5:36-40; 14:25-26; and 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. What do these verses of Scripture tell you about spiritual truth and where to find it? _____

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). A 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, 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. **Read Galatians 2:20 and 6:14-15. Add to those verses the Scriptures already studied concerning what Jesus taught were the terms of discipleship. Is the high, high cost to be paid for following Jesus hidden? If not, why do you believe so few really see it or understand these terms as applying 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*

“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

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.

The second main principle of denial of self (surrender) in Christianity is allowing Christ to "take our place" and live through us. **Read Romans 6:3-11; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21; and Colossians 3:1-**

3. Write in your own words what these verses of Scripture mean. _____

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, *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to*

“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

die is gain...” and *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...”* The real life that Paul and every other disciple of Jesus Christ now have within them comes from 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 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.”*

In a broader, more 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: Romans 8:18-25, *“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*

“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

still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

In a personal sense salvation (sanctification) involves the surrender one's personal will to God's greater will in order for their 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 and the life of Christ within (*Agape*) is fully manifested without the obstruction of the self in the disciple.

Return 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

“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

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.”

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

- 1. The Desire to Look Good (Preserving the Self-image). Read Acts 8:4-24, the story of Simon, the sorcerer. How were his actions being controlled by the desire to Look Good? _____**

“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

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. Like so many stage props and magical tools of the trade, **Look Good** depends upon clothing, language, automobile, house, bank account, 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.

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

“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

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.”

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* can not 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).

Read Luke 18:18-30. Compare with Matthew 13:22, the lesson of the thorny soil. At what point did this rich ruler stop short. Why? _____

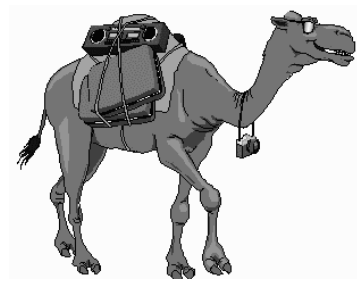
“The Feel Good Giant wants to control our emotions, mind, and heart. This Giant has kept more people from freedom than we can imagine. Feel Good involves avoiding pain and discomfort at any cost, is committed to personal pleasure or gain, and is given to the senses or is sensual. This Giant is the epitome 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

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 this case. 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.

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.

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

“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

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

"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

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. 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.

3. Be Right (Preserving Self-righteousness). 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? _____

“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 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..."* 1 Timothy 6:20-21a (KJV).

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

"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

kingdoms (realms) ruled by two childish and self-styled emperors. **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). Read Matthew 14:25-29. On this particular occasion,

“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

what separated Peter from the other eleven disciples who stayed in the boat? _____

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. Peter was experiencing what it means to live out of another life 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 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*.

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*? _____

"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

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.

The desire to stay in control is one of the greatest traps that Satan sets before 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 video fantasy lands where they spend hours with the video controller in their hands, pretending to be something they are not with power over a 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. What are some of the words used to characterize a person who rejects God's reign over them? _____

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). 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? _____

"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

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).

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). Read Luke 5:27-28; 19:5-10; and John 12:1-6. Note the three very different responses – two positive, one negative – of those who encountered Jesus along the way. _____

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 them in the process. Tax collectors were despised by the

“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

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 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?**_____

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

“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

(factions).” 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 *i.e.* Composure). 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? _____

Remain Undisturbed:
“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

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?** _____

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

In the same way, 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.

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?

"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

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 whole-heartedly 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.

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

"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

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 [*Be Right*] 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 [*Hidden Agenda*], we are persecuting Jesus. Whenever we stand on our dignity [*Look Good*] 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 [*Stay in Control and Remain Undisturbed*]. This will mean that I can be easily put upon, easily over-reached, easily ignored [Feel

1 John 5:1-4

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith."

Good]; 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.

Entering In:

Abiding in Christ

7. Learning to Abide

John 15:4-8

“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.”

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

“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

to have to make some choices. One of those choices involves detaching ourselves from a preoccupation with the values of this world.” (p. 215)

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” 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 consummate 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 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

“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... Christi 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

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 says 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).

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 mounts as the disciples look at one another wondering which one it was and secretly knowing each one of them was capable of betraying Jesus. Then Jesus releases Judas to "go quickly" and put into motion what was already in his heart to do. Once again Jesus proclaims that His time of departure from them has come. He tells 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 proclaims his commitment to lay down his life for Jesus if he had to. But Jesus

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

responds by warning Him before the dawn breaks, he will have denied his Master three times.

At this point Jesus begins to comfort and encourage His disciples. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me..." He tells them that His departure is not to abandon them, but that He is going to prepare a place for them so that *"where I am, there you may be also..."* Still, His disciples are confused, Thomas cries out, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus, replies 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 assures His disciples that because He is going to His Father, He will send them *"another Helper, that He might abide with you forever..."* Jesus encourages them that the Holy Spirit will continue on with them where Jesus has to leave them. He tells them, "Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid..." and assures them once more that He will return again.

There is much, much more Jesus has to reveal to His disciples in these chapters, but this brings us to the key verses for the purposes of this study: John 15:1-10. Read John 15:1-6, 8. Compare with Matthew 13:18-23. (Note also 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? _____

"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

Note that there are four elements of this passage from John 15: the vine, the branches, the vinedresser, 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).

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.

“Our union with Christ is a *living* union, so we may bear fruit; a *loving* union, so that we

“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

may enjoy Him; and a *lasting* union, so that we need not be afraid” – Warren Wiersbe

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. **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?** _____

“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

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.

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? _____

"It is the life of Christ flowing into us that produces the fruit of the Kingdom. 'Apart from Me' (meaning disjointed in union; injured or broken intimacy rather than a covenantal break) will produce nothing for which the Father waits. A son or daughter who has grasped the implications of Agape allows God's love to be replicated 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 life of 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 and 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.

Once again, it is easy to get confused here. “Soul winning” as often encouraged by churches, is usually attached

“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

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 – *kind reproduce kind*. However, only those disciples who are truly abiding in Christ – bearing the seed of 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, forsaking all to walk with Christ to bring other disciples into the church: discipling others 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.

CONCLUSION

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, which is “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27). But I believe enough has been taught so far to point the disciple who truly wants to follow

“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

Jesus Christ on HIS terms. I have included a Bibliography at the end of this Study Guide that lists all the books referenced and quoted throughout this first part of the study. I believe almost all of them can be obtained for further study at the local Christian bookseller or through the Internet (I encourage you to read and study as many of them as you can get). However, the list included here is far from a comprehensive list because throughout its existence God has been speaking this message to His church through many voices and authors. As the days grow shorter until the Lord's return, the urgency of the Spirit speaking to His churches will grow stronger and the call to a life of discipleship will continue to ripple through the church.

Unfortunately, as has been too often been the case, 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

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 HE goes. He eats what they eat; He sleeps where they sleep; He is doing whatever they are doing at any given moment in time. This is the life we have been SAVED TO. 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). Being His disciple is the only way to the Way, Truth, and Life that exist

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.

AMEN.

CONCLUSION

We began our study by examining *The Three Things God Lost* in the Garden. What Adam lost, God lost: Adam lost ***The Life*** of the Spirit of God in man; ***The Truth*** of the Reign of God in himself; and ***The Way*** of intimacy with his Creator. God also lost ***The Life*** (His living Tabernacle in the hearts of men); ***The Truth*** (His Reign over the hearts of men and over the earth); and ***The Way*** (His intimate relationship with those created in His image). *Kingdom Discipleship* is God's way to restoring that which was lost when Adam's race fell.

The problem is, 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 brought us to ask the question, why are Christians not becoming more like Jesus? The answer is found in Jesus' teachings – in particular in the key parable of "The Sower and the Soils." In that parable, Jesus revealed to His disciples the heart conditions that prevented "the seed of the word of the kingdom" from penetrating the hearts of so many who start out as believers, but never reach the goal of being like Jesus. The spiritual strongholds and hearts entangled in the earthly pursuits are what prevent those who are called to a life of maturity and fruitfulness in Christ from reaching that intended purpose.

The remedy for those poor heart conditions is 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 Kingdom Discipleship is possible for anyone to achieve apart from taking up their cross daily and dying to self. The dying to self is the Agape Road because

God's love for us and working 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 of "Christ in us."

Exactly what we must die to is what is called "the Seven Giants of Self": Look Good, Feel Good, Be Right, Stay in Control, Taking Personal Advantage, Having a Hidden Agenda, and Remain Undisturbed. In their own ways, each of these Giants block the flow of Agape in the life of the disciple and keep them from being able to *Abide* (live) in Jesus Christ the living Vine. 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 *Kingdom Disciple*: to discover what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and how we must yield to His Agape as it flows into the "good soil" of our heart prepared to receive, then we are in the right place for the Holy Spirit to bring *Lifecchange* (transformation).

Being a disciple is only 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." We teach and are being taught. 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.

In a further study we will study the Seven Laws (principles) of Jesus the Teacher. These Laws are not intended to create clever formulas or to provide step-by-step instructions on how to make disciples (not that it is even possible to do it "by the book"), but those Laws will be studied to provide the most effective tools and guidelines to keep us on the right road: the *Agape Road*.

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*.**

Kingdom Discipleship in its fullness 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.

AMEN

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