

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 1)

Scripture:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 1st , 2006

The First Church Goers

Acts 6:1-7 (NASB)

¹ Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*. ² And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³ “But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ “But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. ⁷ And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Introduction In the world today, Christianity is huge. Generally, people who fall under the heading “Christian,” comprise about a third of the population of the world: 6.652 billion as of this past Friday... And among those two billion or so “Christianly”-categorized folk, probably about half of that are people under the umbrella of Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy (which are in themselves huge and complicated), and the other half would break down into about 34,000 specific brands of non-high church Christianity, (sort of “Protestant”) and supposedly, about half of which are independent churches that want no connection with anyone outside their church. Among Protestants, 16 million are Southern Baptists. That denomination in itself is a complex institution. We also have a giant Christian publishing industries—starting with large cross-lingual work of translating the Bible—a thing we rejoice in... There is a gigantic music and video industry, big mega-conferences, camping, broadcasting and media, all the missions organizations with all their support, parachurch ministries and on

and on. My point is, that Christianity is huge and it has just become so in the last hundred years or so. One can get lost trying to look at it globally, or comprehensively.

And still, as news that Jesus was not dead spread, and as the apostles were able to share the promise of eternal life with more and more, the movement began to grow. In fact, by the end of the second century Christianity had spread throughout the whole Roman empire, and beyond—despite severe persecutions and internal strife. The Gospel just has a way of growing!

Today, we begin a new series, looking at some different aspects of what it means NOW to follow Jesus. In our passage today (Acts 6), the word disciple is used in verse 1 and in verse 7. Luke tells us that the number was increasing. And in the most meaningful ways, “discipleship” means the same things today as it did in the beginning days. Remember, we are still opposed by the same three ancient enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. It blows my mind, and I never seem to recover from it, that we, now, are engaged in the same cosmic struggle, battle, conflict, that Peter and James and John and Mary were.

So what about the first church-goers? What were they about?

First we want to realize that when the whole thing got started, there was little of what we would typically recognize as “Christianity.” So much of what we associate with *modern Christianity* LITTLE reflects the earliest followers of Jesus of Nazareth and their practices—**FEAR NOT, I AM NOT SAYING WE’RE NOT DOING WHAT WE’RE SUPPOSED TO DO...TO SOME EXTENT “DISCIPLESHIP” GROWS AND DEVELOPS OVER THE CENTURIES.** But if “discipleship” is a word we want to use, we need to understand what it what the word **disciple**¹ originally meant: which was to be a learner, a pupil, a student. We need, I think, to be STRUCK with the fact that when the first Christians were around, **no one spoke English**, (there were basically three languages: Aramaic, Greek and Latin); they had **no technology at all**, owned **no church buildings** at all. **Communication was difficult and slow** (they had only a few couriers to hand-deliver letters); they all lived under a **devastating political situation**--a brutal and uncompromising Roman occupation force; they were all considered **cult members**; they often **disagreed among themselves** about doctrine, and they had **no Bibles**. They did **not “go to church”** as we so closely associate with Christianity because mostly they met in **small groups** with very few large gatherings possible.

We look today at Acts 6:1-7 where we can catch a glimpse, just a bit of flavor of the first “church goers.” By the time of Acts 6 (John MacArthur surmises) the figure of total Christians could have reached over 20,000 men and women.¹ But some were from other places than Palestine and there *may* have been some

¹John MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed., Ac 6:1 (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997).

suspiciousness in the minds of the local (**Hebrew**) Christians. Thus, some of the **Hellenistic** (Greek-speaking) Jewish-Christian widows were being overlooked.

The church saw its responsibility as social from the earliest date. They knew that with a large influx of new people—from a significantly different social background—they had to meet their needs.

The twelve apostles were in charge. Their job at that point, was primarily to study for teaching, prayer and oversight of the new organization. While it may sound snobby or elitist to US for them to say, **It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables**, it was the height or practicality for them. There were thousands of Christians in their new network of people. Details of food preparation and serving was better left to others. The apostles LEFT that job to others and designated that the organization on the whole should select who would be in charge of food services.

But they set the standard, **brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task**. Many churches today take this approach in selecting secondary church leaders basing their practice on this model. For example, the congregation nominates deacons, and the elders appoint some or all of them. This approach was common in Judaism. It was not a new plan that the apostles devised, though it was new to the church. “Selecting *seven men* may go back to the tradition in Jewish communities where seven respected men managed the public business in an official council.”²

Verse 5a is an encouragement: **And the statement found approval with the whole congregation...** The strategy was determined by the apostles, and they people selected the servants/administrators who would take care of the need. The people thought this was good. They were quality men! And interestingly, only seven. They would have plenty of work to do, I am sure. But we can see that “discipleship” among the first Christians demonstrated

- Leadership – the apostles devised the strategy.
- Availability – the seven men were obviously willing to serve and to take the responsibility.
- Integrity – they were not just ANY available men! They were men of **good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom**, and able to **take charge**. That is the kind of integrity that Christian servants and leaders should always have. That has not changed.
- Approval/willingness – the larger body selected the TEAM of seven (only two of whom are ever again mentioned in the New Testament), who were willing to do the job together.

²Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Ac 6:2 (Galaxie Software, 2003).

- Ordination – there was a “launching” of the team by prayer and the laying on of hands. This is what we mean by “ordination.” It involves recognition and trust as qualities we practice and affirm.

Then, in verse 7 Luke summarizes this glimpse with the encouraging report, ***And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.***

The implication is that they did things right, and so did not hinder the work of the Spirit in growing the church. Even some unlikely candidates to believe in Jesus were coming to faith (***becoming obedient***): Temple priests in Jerusalem! If the problem of inequality of serving widows had NOT been dealt with well, do you think verse 7 would have happened? I think their unity and cooperation, and willingness to use the apostles’ approach, and let THEM do their jobs, contributed to their growing success.

So though they spoke no English, the early disciples communicated, solved problems, and though they had no Bibles, concordances, commentaries or cool software, ***the word of God kept on spreading***. It is living and WILL spread.

Though they had no technology at all or devices or aids to communication, they heard the problem and innovated a workable solution.

Though they **owned** no church buildings **at all** they obviously found a way to accommodate the needs of the widows—they WERE the building, as Paul called them.

Though **they all lived under a** devastating political situation—they understood that THEY were part of a deeper citizenship that now transcended ethnicity and politics.

Though **they were all considered** cult members they left their own *success* to the Lord and they watched Him add to them daily. They didn’t wait around for the media to approve of them and they had a proper focus.

Though **they often** disagreed among themselves **about doctrine**, and a lot of other things, here was one time at least when they DID agree on how to solve a problem.

Though **they did not “go to church”** as we understand it, they assembled as the very Temple of God, functioned as His body, like a living organism, diverse but alive and caring mutually for each other.

Discipleship meant body life. It meant innovation and prayer. It meant acceptance of new people and it meant following the apostles. We will look in coming weeks at a number of other things that characterized New Testament following of Jesus and I trust you will be motivated to seek Him, to look for Him, to listen to Him and to obey Him.

DISCIPLE (תַּלְמִיד, H9441, לָמַד, H4341; μαθητής, G3412; μαθητρία, *learner, pupil, disciple*).

The idea of discipleship is very old. It was common among the Greeks, rarely mentioned in the OT (1 Chron 25:8; Isa 8:16; 50:4), yet a prominent feature of later Judaism. It always involved a teacher-student relationship. Derived as it was from verbs meaning “to learn,” discipleship denoted the learning process but its usage described in addition the necessity of the disciple adopting the philosophy, practices and way of life of his teacher (cf. Xen. Mem. 1. 6. 3). Physical proximity of the student to his teacher was also implied in the meaning of discipleship, although there are instances when its meaning was extended to include pupils separated from their masters by centuries (Dio Chrysostrom 38 [55]. 3-5; John 9:28, where Jews contemporary with Jesus called themselves disciples of Moses).

Discipleship is also a prominent and important concept in the NT. John the Baptist had his disciples (Matt 9:14), the Pharisees theirs (22:16), even Paul his (Acts 9:25).

Most often, however, the word “disciple” was used to denote the relationship between Jesus and His followers. In its widest sense it included all those who believed on Him (John 8:30, 31), or who came to learn from Him (Matt 5:1, 2). At one time these disciples were many (Luke 6:17) and included a cross-section of society from sinners to scribes (Matt 8:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-15; Luke 6:14-16; John 19:38). Many of these were from Galilee, but not all (John 7:3).

The word disciple also was used more narrowly, referring to some or all of Jesus’ intimate circle of friends (Matt 10:1; 11:1; Luke 9:54; John 6:8), a frequent synonym for the Twelve.

All of Jesus’ disciples were learners required to “abide” in His word (John 8:31, 32). This meant not only that they were to listen to what He said, but they were also to adopt His teaching as their way of life (Luke 6:40; John 15:7, 8).

His teachings covered many topics, but the whole of it was summarized in one commandment, love (John 13:34); and although discipleship had many facets it was summed up in a single concept—obedience to this command (13:35).

Jesus’ teaching was for the many to hear (Matt 5-7; 13). Because it was radical, and, esp. that about Himself, too difficult to accept (John 6:60), the majority of disciples defected (6:66). Consequently, much of what He taught about His death and resurrection (Matt 16:21), about the end of the age (Mark 13), about love, the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 14-16), etc., was given only to the inner circle (6:68).

Discipleship was initiated by Jesus (Matt 4:19, an exception being Luke 9:57), and involved a commitment to His person even more than to His teaching. (Note: to criticize Jesus’ disciples was to criticize Jesus, Mark 2:18, 23, 24, and to remove the teacher was to destroy the community of disciples, Mark 14:27, 50.) This is not to say that His disciples were unconcerned with what He taught. They prob. memorized much of His teaching, as was customary for disciples to do, and no doubt were responsible for passing on this teaching as the tradition of the church (1 Cor 15:1-3).

The idea of physical adjacency inherent in the word disciple also applied specifically to Jesus’ associates. It was this idea that placed such radical demands on any one desiring to be His disciple. An itinerant rabbi, Jesus was constantly on the move. To be His disciple was in a literal way to be His follower. (Note: the verb “to follow” occurs about eighty times in the gospels, and exclusively describes the relationship between the earthly Jesus and His companions. It became a synonym for disciple.) This meant, therefore, that every disciple in the strict sense had to leave his occupation (Mark 1:18, 19), his father and mother (10:29), everything (10:28), take up his cross and go forward even to death (Matt 10:38). For the disciple was not above his teacher (10:24), and what would happen to the teacher could also happen to the taught (10:25; Luke 6:40).

The expression “disciple of Jesus,” was also used less strictly. It described those who were His disciples secretly (John 19:38), and by implication those who were not at all physically adjacent to Him (cf. Mark 9:38-40; 5:18, 19). This looser concept of disciple may have made it possible for the writer of Acts to use it as a general term for “Christian” (Acts 9:25 and 19:1 are the only exceptions), the original idea of being an intimate companion of the earthly Jesus now almost forgotten.

Surprisingly, the word “disciple” never appears a single time in the NT outside of the gospels and Acts. It is also instructive to discover that the verb “to follow,” a synonym for disciple and used frequently in the gospels, occurs only twice outside of them to describe the relationship between the risen Lord and His adherents (Rev 14:4; 19:14). Apparently, therefore, because the writers of the epistles saw in the meaning of the words “disciple” and “follower” a disciple-teacher relationship no longer possible in the new era, they dropped them from their vocabulary lest those requirements for the disciples of the earthly Jesus—to leave one’s trade, his father and mother, etc.—be universalized and made general requirements for those who would believe on Him now as the exalted heavenly Lord.

The word “disciple” was revived, however, in the writings of the early sub-apostolic Church, and given much the same meaning as that in Acts, “Christian.” Ignatius, however, employed it almost exclusively to denote those who became martyrs for the sake of Christ (Trallians 5:2; Ephesians 1; 2).

Bibliography K. H. Rengstorf, μαθητής, G3412, (1942), in G. Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, tr., and ed. by G. W. Bromiley; E. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (1960); J. J. Vincent, “Discipleship and Synoptic Studies,” *Theologische Zeitschrift*, XVI (1960), 456-469; S. Legasse, *Scribes et disciples de* □□□□□□, RB, LXVIII (1961), 321-345; B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (1964). G. F. Hawthorne Professor of Greek, Wheaton College from the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 2)

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 8th, 2006

Blessings of Following

Matthew 16:13-20 (NASB)

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He *began* asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He *said* to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said to him, "**Blessed** are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. ¹⁹ "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

Introduction In Jesus' day, people were wondering, "Who IS this fellow?" Today, people wonder the same thing. Thirty-five years ago Larry Norman wrote a song called *The Outlaw*:

some say He was an outlaw that He roamed across the land
with a band of unschooled ruffians and a few old fishermen
no one knew just where He came from or exactly what He'd done
but they said it must be something bad that kept Him on the run

some day He was a poet that He'd stand upon the hill
and His voice could calm an angry crowd or make the waves stand still
that He spoke in many parables that few could understand
but the people sat for hours just to listen to that man

some say He was a sorcerer a man of mystery
He could walk upon the water He could make a blind man see
that He conjured wine at weddings and did tricks with fish and bread
that He talked of being born again and raised people from the dead

some say a politician who spoke of being free
He was followed by the masses on the shores of Galilee
He spoke out against corruption and He bowed to no decree

and they feared His strength and power so they nailed Him to a tree

some say He was the Son of God a man above all men
but He came to be a servant and to set us free from sin
and that's who I believe He was 'cause that's who I believe
and I think we should get ready 'cause it's time for us to leave

In the passage today, Matthew records that some thought Jesus was a resurrected or reincarnated John the Baptist. Some thought he was Elijah the prophet come back or Jeremiah the prophet or one of the other prophets. Peter, of course, thought Jesus was ***the Christ, the Son of the living God***. And then we use the word “discipleship”. It can mean different things to different people and in fact it can even have varying meanings in the New Testament.¹

We are interested in the matter of discipleship because what we REALLY want to get at is, are you a “disciple?”

- One simple idea of discipleship is to say that a “disciple” is a PERSON WHO WANTS TO FIND OUT WHO JESUS REALLY IS.
- There’s the social aspect in the word too: Here’s one description of “discipleship” that I like: Discipleship is THE INTENSELY PERSONAL ACTIVITY OF TWO OR MORE PERSONS HELPING EACH OTHER EXPERIENCE A GROWING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. Discipleship is being before doing, maturity before ministry, character before career.¹ .
Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- We mean those people that are serious about **following Jesus Christ**.

We don’t get mad (or we shouldn’t) at those who are not following Him, or who are not yet drawn to Him. But disciples are really those who would stay with Jesus, who would keep seeking Him.

- Some are raised to follow Jesus, and then at some point choose not to.
- Some start out following Him, and become distracted or discouraged or disillusioned.

We mean those who really WANT Him in their lives.

We mean those who will, as Jesus said, “take up your cross and go after Him.”

And for those who DO, there is great blessing. As Peter said, *you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God* Jesus replied, ***BLESSED are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*** He said to Peter, “YOU ARE IN GOOD SHAPE, PETER. You are happy; you’re in a great situation. You did not figure out by yourself that I am God’s Son. My FATHER revealed this to you and because of that you are one happy, well-set-up, properly-situated BLESSED fellow!” People who really follow Jesus Christ, and keep doing so, really have been shown deep in their hearts by

God Himself, who Jesus is. They have been drawn by the effectual calling of God. They have been *wooed* by the grace of God which is really irresistible, and who would want to resist such goodness anyway! They have been bathed and washed and refueled and rebuilt by the sovereign goodness of a loving God who has opened their hearts and minds and enlivened their desire for Christ. Blessed is that person. Beyond imagination. If you see Christ for who He really is, you will be a happy person. Oh, you may not be “happy” all the time. In fact, in SEEING who He really is, you will probably have some trouble in your life down here... for a while. But there are some real blessings for following Christ, and I want to lay a few out for you today.

1. There is No Better Leader

Men and women always look for inspirational leaders. Vince Lombardi. Julia Ward Howe (*The Battle Hymn of the Republic*). Ghandi. Dwight Eisenhower. Dr. Mae Jemison (first African-American woman in space.) Dr. Jonas Salk. Robert E. Lee. Watchman Nee. Martin Luther King. Clara Barton. William Bradford. Cochise. Winston Churchill. Today, people look to their Presidents, their Senators, their fathers and mothers, if they work for a good company, their bosses and C.E.O.s. Sometimes they even look to their spiritual leaders for direction and guidance...

But in Jesus Christ, there was and is no better leader. ***And they immediately left their nets and followed Him*** (Matthew 4:20). When you decide to dedicate your life to following Him you will never find a better leader for your life. He gives the finest wisdom, the most trustworthy guidelines for living, a presence that does not vary or waver with time. He never messes up His people and He never abandons them. He injects us with courage and resolute determination to finish our course. He gives joy and peace. He connects us with good people just when we need it. He provides our basic needs and He answers prayer. There is no finer leader, no one more worthy of following and even laying your life down for.

2. There is no more intelligent decision. See 1st Corinthians 1:20-25

The world celebrates some great decisions over time, and there are some awesome examples in history of human intelligence: Roman aqueducts; the Magna Carta; Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony; the Declaration of Independence; the Emancipation Proclamation; the decision to invade Normandy; the polio vaccine; placing a man on the moon... But ultimately, the most intelligent decision a person can ever make is the decision to follow Jesus Christ, to explore what that means, to make it a quest to find Jesus more and more and more in your daily life. It is the height of smart decisions! Why? Because the consequences are incalculable, in fact, eternal. Because the benefits of trusting

in Christ are exquisitely wonderful. Because the Gospel is the most brilliant plan that ever was. Because the smartest thing there is, is to give glory to God and nothing brings glory to God like entering the kingdom of heaven as a redeemed child of God, bought back by the blood of the Son!

3. There is No Better Companionship (and if for no other reason than Rev.19:7-9). There is a great blessing in following Jesus Christ because you find that there is no better companionship than what you get in your fellow brothers and sisters. Our kinship can be felt across international and ethnic barriers. We receive many friends who all share the same “stake” in the risks of fellowship. We find that we have such similar feelings as our brethren when we think in a Spirit-filled way. We all know that we will, one day, be together at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Perhaps believers never feel their companionship more tightly than when they are being persecuted. Then, they really need each other and this has been the history of Christians more often than not in two thousand years! Often believers have needed their brethren to help them when they are in danger.

4. There is No Better Personal Improvement Program or Investment of Your Resources (though you may lose your life). (1st Corinthians 2:9)

Though you may lose your life for Christ, and you DO lose your pride and your self-focus, if you follow Him, you find there is no better program for improving yourself. When it comes to “You,” there are many plans, philosophies and programs out there! Many religions—some quite popularly celebrated today—offer various “benefit packages.” But Jesus Christ makes a person better “from the inside, out.” By His Spirit working within us, He gradually goes about the work of re-making us and doing so to the specification of His own character. He is re-making us to be like Him. Yes, the bar is high. The standard is perfection. But He will get us there. YOU WILL GET BETTER, and TRULY SO. For some of us, certain aspects of our sin and old nature are deep-rooted. They do not come out or change easily. But Jesus is relentless. He will not be defeated in His loving plan to redeem us and to do so completely.

If you will make a decision to really follow Jesus Christ, you WILL see progress and you will NOT take credit for it yourself if you are smart—because you know that the progress you make is by His good hand of grace to you. If you defeat selfishness at all, you will praise Him for you will see that it is a quality work which He does in you. If you manage to lessen the tendency to covet or to lust or to lash out or to brag, you will praise Him for doing that in and for you.

5. There is No Better Education

Martin Luther King Jr. said in 1948, “Most of [my college] ‘brethren’ think that education should equip them with the proper instruments of exploitation so that they can forever trample over the masses. Still others think that education should furnish them with noble ends rather than means to an end. It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture. Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life.” Encyclopedia Britannica of 1952 says the purpose of education is to raise up children to follow in their parents traditions with good success, because parents in all societies want their children to have the same values as themselves. Whatever the purpose of education all will agree I think that to remain ignorant or unaware is of no value. Learning and growing in wisdom is the common pursuit of all rational people. For the disciple of Jesus, that person knows that ***the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*** (Prov.1:7), ***the fear of the Lord prolongs life*** (Prov.10:27) and ***by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil*** (Prov.16:6).

- To learn and grow in wisdom and insight and smart choices and carefulness and foresight, at the foot of Jesus Christ, as one of His followers—by means of His word and the Holy Spirit, is to find no better education. He gives *teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness*.¹
- We learn RELIABLE information about God.
- We learn about ourselves, including blind spots about ourselves we cannot otherwise discover.
- We learn about working with people and about how to get the most intelligent thing ever devised—the Gospel—to people who need it.
- We learn about the future, when the world can only dream and guess.

6. There is No Obsolescence (1st Peter 1:3-7)

The true follower does not have to worry if their following is just something old people do, or just something you do when you don’t have anything ELSE to do. He does not worry about whether a better lifestyle might be invented, discovered, liberated, explored and found, crafted or conquered. Following Jesus never gets obsolete. It is the same thing for the follower who is fifteen years old as it is for the follower who is seventy five years old.

7. There is no other sacrifice

I am sure the best and most awesome benefit of following Jesus is as the writer to the Hebrews wrote to them, ***if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*** (Hebrews 10:26). No person in the long history of our entire planet can find Jesus, abandon Him, and then discover a BETTER sacrifice for sin. If you

abandon Jesus, you are without a sacrifice for sin. If you keep following Him, His sacrifice always blazes and holds for you. Just as completely and powerfully and purifyingly as it did on that first day you grasped His cross for yourself, by faith. No other sacrifice will ever do it. No device of man to better himself, no education, no science, no reformation, no enlightenment will give sacrifice for sin.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 3)

Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 15th, 2006

Following by Trusting

Hebrews 11:1-16 (NASB)

¹ Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. ⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. ⁷ By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; ¹² therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.* ¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Introduction Some of you have read *The Chronicles of Narnia* by the eminent Oxford-man C.S. Lewis. If you haven't, they are seven books which Lewis wrote for children about some English kids during the Second World War who are sent off to the country side to avoid the bombing in London. There, in an English manor owned by a reclusive old gentleman, three of those children, by exploring an old wardrobe, are magically transported to a wonderful land called *Narnia*. In that land, they meet its king, a lion named Aslan, and they have many adventures there. The story is an allegory of Christ and His kingdom. Less than one month before he died in 1963, C. S. Lewis wrote the following letter to a young girl who wanted to know if any other Narnia books

were going to be produced. It turned out to be a fond and fitting farewell to all of his devoted readers.

Dear Ruth,

Many thanks for your kind letter, and it was very good of you to write and tell me that you like my books; and what a very good letter you write for your age! If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope that you may always do so. I'm so thankful that you realized the "hidden story" in the Narnia books. It is odd, children nearly always do, grown-ups...hardly ever. I'm afraid the Narnia series has come to an end, and am sorry to tell you that you can expect no more.

God bless you. Yours sincerely,

C.S. Lewis¹

Narnia is a lot about faith, not seeing, but believing. And also basically, the whole Bible is about faith. It is sixty-six books, each of which points to the importance of faith in God as a thing to have. Some books are more obtuse in their presentation of "faith." Esther has no mention of God, personally, in it at all and yet is a great illustration of the courageous faith of a young woman. In all five of the apostle John's writing, the word **faith** is very rare. It is not found at all in his Gospel, only once in his three epistles and only four times in the whole book of Revelation. And yet, no one would dispute the importance of "faith" in the mind of the apostle John. On the other hand, the word itself **faith** IS all over the apostles Peter, James and Paul. And you add in Moses, David and the prophets and you have a group of writings spanning 1,600 years all of which say clearly, "you must believe and you must walk by faith. No faith? No relationship with God." The Bible is about faith. You can't get around it.

Our passage today began with the words ***Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*** Or to give the word "faith" a definition, we use this one:

FAITH = CONFIDENCE THAT THINGS YET FUTURE AND UNSEEN WILL HAPPEN AS GOD REVEALED THEY WILL

Our faith reaches to the past--You either are convinced that Christ's transaction on the cross was real, or you are not. And in the present in your belief in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—your faith is not dependent on this church or that church; and the future—your hope of Christ's coming. And if not, you must conclude that the rest of us who do believe are deluded. The 66 biblical books testify that the hope of the Christian is based on true things that are coming.

Again, let us be very clear about this--we believe that you cannot BECOME saved by any means at all other than by faith. Our authority for that is basically the apostles Paul and Peter. They wrote that this is true. Only by believing in the atonement of Jesus Christ can you go to heaven. You are, as Paul says, *justified* or, declared righteous, by your simple faith in what Jesus did. It has to be by faith because you cannot SEE or HEAR Jesus today. Yet. You can only read or hear about Him, and entrust yourself to Him and to His work on the cross, for you. But faith is not just about becoming "saved." Apparently some early Christians must have thought that because the apostle James writes blazingly against that! ***Faith without works is dead.*** Faith is configuring your life—making choices, decisions, actions, priorities—in light of a conviction that certain things are coming in the future. You live now, in light of then. It makes a difference in all kinds of daily issues. You don't see the future yet, but you know it is coming and you configure your life accordingly. Once you are saved, by faith, you live out a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly and decades-long life by faith; by trusting God with more and more of your life.

- You want someone to marry? You ask God and honor Him with life-principles and wait on Him.
- You struggle with various weaknesses, dysfunctional tendencies, or sins? You consciously invite the power of His Spirit into your life and you watch for Him to strengthen you.
- You become hurt or disappointed or worse by another person, you trust God to give you the ability to FORGIVE that person, because you remember that you too need God's forgiveness.
- You deal with the pressures and challenges of being in a family—you can take things into your own hands or you can repeatedly give it to God and trust Him to work things out.
- You need a job? You ask God to provide just what you need.
- You want good friends? You need some fellowship, you ask God to lead you to someone who can nurture you, who can accept you and who can walk together with you in your Christian walk.
- You want direction and guidance? You read your Bible, trusting that somehow the Lord will meet you there and make verses alive with application for your issues about direction and guidance.

Discipleship is walking by faith. It is taking a conviction about what is coming, into your day-to-day lifestyle. Taking the future-facts into the here-and-now will collide with a few obstacles: people around us who are NOT people of faith. Personal failures or the remaining sin in your life. Perfectionism. The devil. A world system that is not particularly approving of your walk by faith. An entertainment industry that *ridicules* people who walk by faith in Jesus Christ. All of these are things you must overcome daily by your conviction that this world is not all there is! Another world and another life is coming. As is a King!

You BRING your faith to bear upon these issues. What are you wrestling with today? How are you trusting God to help you with that? What are you waiting on God to do in that issue? Sometimes He may just remove it. Other times He may change you to be able to deal with it.

In the rest of the passage in the beginning of Hebrews 11 we have a fuller explanation of faith, with examples—some of which involved people in anguish or frustration in some way...

1. Men of old gained approval (were saved) – verse 2
2. we believe in creation – verse 3
3. Abel – verse 4
4. Enoch – verse 5
5. faith is indispensable – verse 6. Which includes the understatement, **he who comes to God must believe that He is...** and faith in the basic assumption of His goodness: **and He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.**
6. Noah – verse 7
7. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – verses 8-10, 12
8. Sarah – verse 11
9. descendents of Abraham died without receiving the promises – verses 13,14
10. descendents of Abraham look to God's heavenly country – verses 15,16

Your faith should be growing. As the years go by in your Christian walk, you should be turning more and more over to the Lord. You surrender things, that when young were hard to trust Him with, but now you have a longer history of seeing Him come through. Your faith expands. You're still capable of doubts, or getting down, of feeling lonely. But deep inside you know you have fellowship with the Lord. And you begin more to cherish good moments of fellowship with fellow believers... I think this is what John meant, at least in part, when as an old man he wrote, **what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you that may also have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).** Following Jesus Christ means living a life of trusting Him. It means adding to the list year by year of things that you are starting to trust Him for. In your twenties it is one set of issues. In your forties it is pretty much a different set of issues. In your sixties it is a whole NEW set of things that you're trusting God for.

Your faith can encourage other people. If you are just about going to church, your faith will do nothing to help other people. But if your faith is day to day thing, an important part of your waking hours and you are working on

developing your trust in God, and you WANT to see Him work really in your life, then your faith can be a tremendous help and encouragement to other people.

Somehow I don't just mean by talking about it, although that is part of it. I mean as you trust God with various issues they see you doing that. They know you are praying about things in your life, and they might even be praying with you about them. They see the PROCESS of faith in your life, day in and day out; month in and month out.

No one ever said the Christian life was going to be easy. Because it is driven by faith, it ISN'T easy. It would be much easier to be involved with a religion that had lost of visible, physical things attached to it. Go to a Temple. Wear faith-specific clothing and surround yourself with other people who are all wearing religious clothing.

Following Jesus Christ also means a fierce determination to KEEP THE FOCUS ON HIM.

- If you focus too much on leaders and favorite teachers, they can die or even become corrupt.
- If you focus too much on family, they can leave or scatter or even turn on you.
- If you focus too much on traditions or denominations, they can change and leave you feeling out of touch.
- Even if you focus on church friendships and fellowships, they can get wearisome sometimes or even mutate into something unhealthy.

If you want to keep your faith fresh you must always **keep looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith** (12:2). You keep talking to HIM, you keep looking for ways to hear His voice, beginning with His Word. He is the invisible Lord and Savior and King and Lover of our souls and Friend and Shepherd and Messiah and Lamb of God and Son of God... Whom we seek and love and trust with our lives. We expect much of Him. He has promised to give us much. Make Him the object of all your faith. Don't take the rest of us too seriously. We're seeking Him too.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 4)

Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 22nd, 2006

Following by Trusting (Part 2)

Hebrews 11:1-16 (NASB)

¹ Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. ⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. ⁷ By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; ¹² therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.* ¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Introduction Following Jesus is a thing we do invisibly. We follow Him by trusting Him invisibly. We don't see Him yet and so, if we're going to be His disciples, we have to be His followers without the benefit of visual evidence. We place our confidence and dependence in what we read that He said, particularly when He made certain promises. This is hard. Many *think* they are Christians but they aren't trusting Him for much yet. The Bible says that ***without faith it is impossible to please*** God. So, no matter what people's sentimentalities are, or what they want to believe about themselves, if they aren't following Him invisibly, by trusting Him, giving more and more of their lives over to Him by faith, they aren't really Christians, the Bible seems to indicate.

Two gentlemen were traveling on a plane and were seated next to each other. One turned to the other and asked, what do you do? The gentleman replied: "I am a minister." "Oh," said the first man. "I don't believe in this religious stuff. It's for kids, you know, 'Jesus Loves Me This I know, for the Bible tells me so....'" The minister politely laughed and asked the other man what he did for a living. "I am an astronomer," said the first man. "Oh, that stuff," said the minister. "I thought it was just for kids, you know – 'Twinkle, twinkle little star....'"

Let's review for just a minute... We suggested that saving faith has a confidence in the truth of certain things in the **past** (i.e. the resurrection of Jesus Christ), a confidence in the truth of certain things in the **present** (i.e. the indwelling presence of Christ by His Spirit) and a confidence in the truth of certain things in the **future** (i.e. the hope of Christ's second coming). Real faith looks back, looks present and looks forward. Based on Hebrews 11:1 we said last week that **faith is confidence that things yet future and unseen will happen as God revealed they will**. This is our basic, saving faith. You'll have to take my word for it this morning because I'm not going to list out a bunch of Bible verses to document this claim, but it IS what the Bible indicates pretty clearly is what authorizes a person to say "I'm a disciple of Jesus." Is this where you're at? This confidence and trust about matters of our soul is what entitles us to call ourselves "Christians." You either have this faith, or you do not. If you do not, you can find it, get it, be given it, at any time. Ask God for it.

But on a day-to-day basis, we tend to trust Him, I think, in different categories of things... What are the kinds of things at the basic level, that we generally trust Him for?

1. I think our front-line list includes things like food, housing, safety from mishaps or serious accidents, a job when we need one, getting better when we get sick, and *the classic prayer*, "And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord, my soul to take." Then, a little deeper maybe, we want to believe God for some other things...
2. At a second level we might also trust Him sometimes for things like guidance with certain big decisions we are facing, peace of mind, that our country isn't attacked, that the weather will be nice when we want to do or go someplace, that our travel is safe and that our kids and parents love Jesus.

These are all good things and we are hopeful that God will bless us in each one. We go many weeks and HAVE each of these things.

But if we go back to Hebrews 11 and survey the things that *those* people trusted God for, we find a listing that is quite a bit different and far more dramatic. The writer to the Hebrews uses first Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and

Sarah as examples of people trusting God in faith. And I want to challenge your faith beyond the standard stuff, and a little deeper today from these examples...

- **Abel** is mentioned, from way back in Genesis 4, as a fellow whose sacrifice was pleasing to God because it was offered in faith and obedience.¹ Somehow—we're not told exactly how—his faith in worship and what He offered God, was pleasing to God. Faith as it relates to our approach and worship, is significant. "ABEL-FAITH" HAS TO DO WITH GIVING TO THE LORD SOMETHING WHICH YOU HAVE, because you love Him. It is a biblical example of trusting God. I think it's a little different than the standard stuff we trust God for.
- **Enoch**, on the other hand (Genesis 5), reflected the kind of life that pleases God since he walked with God by faith (as the readers also should). If Christ had come in their lifetimes, the readers also would not have experienced death. In any case they could only please God by continued confidence that ***He exists and . . . rewards those who earnestly seek Him.***¹ "ENOCH-FAITH" HAS TO DO WITH ORDERING YOUR DAILY LIFE ACCORDING TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. I think that means acknowledging Him somehow, spending a little time with Him each day. EACH DAY. I think it's also a little different than the standard stuff we trust God for.
- **Noah's** faith (Genesis 6) is a little more specific. He is told to build an ark when, so far as we know, no one knows what rain is yet. And the ark itself is a condemnation (which implies some risk.) He trusted that God knew what He was doing and was grateful I am sure, as were his kids I think after they recovered from the flood, for their salvation. "NOAH-FAITH" IS DOING SOMETHING OUT OF OBEDIENCE, because you know the Lord told you to do it. You may not GET everything about what God told you to do, but you do it. Why? Because He told you to do it, and you have CONFIDENCE that somehow it is for your benefit. ("Rain? What's that?") I think it's also a little different than the standard stuff we trust God for.
- **Abraham** (Genesis 12) picked up and moved his family from Iraq to who knows where? God told Him to do it. "God will guide me," he must have thought. It is also an obedience but it has to do here with going some place. "ABRAHAM-FAITH" IS TRUSTING GOD FOR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE WHEN HE HAS TOLD ME TO GET UP AND GO. His faith was pretty deep. He looked beyond the camels and the dust and the heat and the logistic challenges. He looked for ***a city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God*** (11:10). He had his sights set on something *beyond* this world. He imagined God really coming through with His promise to him. Every day it must have tempered his life, because he wasn't at home in his father's

country, wasn't surrounded with the comforts he grew up with. He had to re-configure his attitude about what the purpose of life itself was. I think this is a whole lot different than the standard stuff we trust God for.

- **Sarah** (Genesis 17,18) believed God (eventually) to do something which seemed impossible. I'm not sure we would know that she really did believe God from just the Genesis account—but the writer to the Hebrews informs us such, and celebrates her as an example of faith. Her faith may have been just a little. But she did believe God's incredible promise. At 90 she would have a child! And it would be the beginning of a HUGE blessing to she and Abraham. SARAH-FAITH BELIEVES GOD FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE, WHEN HE HAS PROMISED THAT.

The rest of Hebrews 11 gives more excellent examples—Abraham again, with the great challenge to just obey and trust God in the pending sacrifice OF that only son. Isaac and Jacob are both listed as examples of men who, in faith, blessed *their* sons and grandsons. With Jacob, it is a faith that takes him through death. He doesn't cave in the final hours—he wishes continuity of trusting God for his kids. MOSES is mentioned, and his parents who kept him hidden. They really trusted God to protect their child, and Moses himself, older, chooses to associate with his down-trodden kinsmen. Took a lot of faith, though he never had the benefit of Sunday School or a godly home.

You might say, “Well that's different. Those are the heroes of the faith and Hebrews 11 is in the Bible.” What does that have to do with me? I'm happy just to trust God for a job and for a safe vacation, and that I don't get a terminal illness (maybe) and for this and that... How does Hebrews 11 illustrate faith for ME?

Exercising faith is what makes Christianity relevant. (the word “**NOW**” comes to mind.) I think this is our biggest challenge today between the generation of older Christians and their kids. The kids are asking, even if they're not asking it out loud, “How is Christianity—as a some kind of way of life—RELEVANT to me? I'm not out in some hard wilderness, waiting for God to rain down quail or manna on me?” But when those of us who are older are demonstrating God's presence by actively trusting Him with issues, and the kids know this, it SHOWS how our faith meets our issues in life...

Second, **exercising faith is what makes Christianity feel real** (or, you might say, **EXCITING**.) There is that part of our Christianity which is, play. And there is the part that's authentic. When someone offends me and I find the

ability to let it go, an ability beyond my natural self, I know Jesus is really working in my heart. If I ask God secretly to move in a situation, and He does, He gets the praise and I get the JOY. He is real. I saw this on the Haiti trip. The last few days were challenging in the temptation to not go. But God showed up. In more ways than I could count.

Third, **exercising faith is what makes Christianity defensible.** (I think of the word “**WIN.**”) Frankly, I am proud of our God. I am proud of my claim that Jesus is the only way because He is such an EXCELLENT way and He gets the job done! No one who goes to Him truly, and approaches Him in faith, risking it, gets turned away. I do not claim to understand all the complexities of who REALLY has faith and who is just masquerading it, but I know that our faith, in pure form is the most excellent way there is. It is, in fact, THE way. I can defend it to myself, to the skeptics, to the devil and to a cynical culture.

Let me challenge you today to take an inventory of the things you are trusting God for actively today. You might even want to write some things down for your prayer time. Think about the standard stuff, and give thanks to the Lord for the things He has come through on for you. (That’s an act of worship, by the way.) Then think about what areas and things you’re thinking about, maybe worrying about, maybe obsessing about that you haven’t talked with the Lord about yet. That you haven’t given over to Him and asked Him to work on. And do that. Start to TRUST God for some new areas and some new items. Ask God to work in YOUR heart in these things as you wait on Him. It might be giving to the Lord something that you have (like Abel). It might be related to ordering your life and just making a decision to walk with God every day (like Enoch). It might be doing something out of obedience just because you know the Lord wants you to do it, and you don’t see how it makes sense (like Noah). It might be trusting God for guidance when you know He has told you to get up and GO (like Abraham). Or, it might be to believe God for something impossible because you feel like He has promised it to you (like Sarah). Trust Him. This is what disciples do. They grow in faith, and increase the areas of trust of God in their lives. They live supernaturally. They are hungry to see God work. They watch for God to work...

Doing Discipleship, Together

Acts 9:20-31 (NASB)

²⁰ and immediately he *began* to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” ²¹ And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and *who* had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?” ²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ. ²³ And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through *an opening* in the wall, lowering him in a large basket. ²⁶ And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic *Jews*; but they were attempting to put him to death. ³⁰ But when the brethren learned *of it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. ³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

When I first became a Christian I was immediately connected to a group of guys from my dormitory. It was a ministry called The Navigators and they had this strange, unwritten policy that was the guys mainly spent time with the guys and the girls with the girls. Dating within the Navigators was discouraged, because they said, that if you dated you would be distracted in your pursuit of Christ.

The guys I worked with—maybe 7 or 8, Lorenzo, Jim, Joe, Tony, Chuck, J.P.-- were all pretty raw in the faith, none had grown up in Christian homes really, and the camaraderie was great. It was with them that I first learned the word “discipleship.” We were all interested in following Jesus Christ, though none of us knew much about how to do that. We were led by a fellow named Donald, who seemed so much older and wiser and mature to us. I look back now and laugh... Donald was 24 at the time...

“Discipleship” meant memorizing Bible verses, and reciting them to each other sometimes, doing Bible study together once a week, going out for subs together and lots of just talking and batting things around, sometimes going door to door in the dorms trying the witness to people, going to retreats and hearing big-time Navigator speakers, and prayer together. That was it. It was pretty simple.

But I learned something real important in my first months as a Christian. I learned that discipleship is intended to be done **together**, along with someone else. As I began to read the New Testament I saw that following Jesus was often done BETWEEN people. They followed Jesus TOGETHER.

Mark 6:7-13 (NASB)

⁷ And He *summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits; ⁸ and He instructed them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, except a mere staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belt; ⁹ but *to* wear sandals; and *He added*, “Do not put on two tunics.” ¹⁰ And He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. ¹¹ “And any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake off the dust from the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.” ¹² And they went out and preached that *men* should repent. ¹³ And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

I have thought a lot about that over the years. Now, it seems easier said than done. We are so often striving with each other, as much as helping each other, it seems. We get personal in evaluating our success, and we get self-focused on things so that our discipleship takes a back seat to other things we want out of life. We suffer a battery of offenses about how we’re treated and whether we are being appreciated or not, about whether one is dominant over another and who is in control. We forget that our first commission is to go and make NEW disciples, baptizing them and teaching them.

Now today, unplanned, I want to encourage us about being together in discipleship. We’re not in a competition. We’re not under the law so that if we don’t follow Jesus perfectly we are failures—none of us can do that so we should take it easy on each other. And the first place where we should be following Jesus together, is among those of us who are married to each other...

Discipleship Together in Marriage

This is the FIRST reason why if you are a Christian you should not marry a non-Christian. If you marry a non-Christian that person cannot go along with you as you follow Jesus. You are seeking Him alone. But if you are two Christians you

can help each other follow Him. If you are a Christian, and you are married to another Christian, let me ask you:

1. what can you do to help your spouse follow Jesus better?
2. Can you help them get the Word into their lives better?
3. Can you give him or her prayer support?
4. Can you free up time for them to seek the Lord?
5. Is there some way to actually do a short devotional together in a way that is not threatening or boring?
6. Can you accommodate their going on a retreat once in a while of joining their own small group? What can you do to help them follow Christ more closely?

Secondly, together in this church, how can we assist each other in

Discipleship Together in the Church?

This ought to really be what church life is about, pure and simple... Following Jesus together. We get all lost in other things in church life. But how can we GO TOGETHER down the road, with Jesus? He led His disciples from town to town, from one exciting encounter (sometimes scary), to another...

You have to love Mark 5 as Jesus and the disciples get off the boat together in the *country of the Gerasenes...*

Mark 5:1-3 (NASB)

¹ AND they came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when He had come out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, ³ and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain

There's Peter and John standing there next to the boat, looking at each other as Mr. Night of the Living Dead comes down to them, next to Jesus though. Jesus deals with him. Peter and John are with Him, learning, observing... Years later I can imagine Peter and John sitting around some campfire, reminiscing about that day. Each would face long years of struggle. They would need each other. They would remind each other of things Jesus did and said. We need to do that. We need to remind each other of Jesus Christ and who He is and what He does. That ought to really be what all church life, including our ministry with the kids, is all about—following Christ together and helping each other, whatever it may take, to follow Him better. Sometimes that's exhortation. Sometimes its binding up each other's wounds. Sometimes its reminding each other of what we already know. But it should always be positive and not competitive. It should never be jockeying for prominence, like when the disciples were lobbying for better position in the kingdom... And then in the place of school, for those of you who are in school.

Discipleship Together in School

Luke 1:1-4 (NASB)

¹ INASMUCH as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things

accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught..... **Acts**

1:1,2 ¹ THE first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

We don't know much about who Theophilus was, but it seems reasonable that he was someone in some kind of academic friendship with Luke, at least that is a possibility. Have you considered how to follow Christ together in school? As I say, it was in school that I grew a lot in discipleship along with other guys. When you're in school it is a unique time in your life, whether its high school or college or graduate school. You are TOGETHER with other Christians. How can you make a difference for each other and HELP each other grow in Christ? Are you aware of other Christians around you, when you're in school?

Finally, there are opportunities to do discipleship together just almost randomly between friends.

Discipleship Together Between Friends

You may not be married to that other disciple, in the same church or at school with them. You MAY just have sort of a random friendship with that person. How can you go together with Jesus Christ, side by side, with that person?

Hebrews 10:23-25 (NASB)

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

We ought to be aware of friendships we have outside our other associations, and how we can enjoy them together as we follow Jesus. There are encouragements we can give and receive from other people who are seeking the Lord. We need to open our eyes and see them, and realize that we are not alone.

I have a new acquaintance who is a young man I have never met. He is a graduate student at Texas A&M University and I am slowly getting to know him via my "blog." He is seeking Christ. So am I. I enjoy sensing the Lord a little in his life.

We are not alone in this pursuit of God. We need to see ourselves as doing discipleship together and that should temper our sense of each other. In marriage, in this church, for those in school together, and in a wider sense among our friends in other places. We are part of the body of Christ. That is no insignificant fellowship. We are a band of brothers and sisters. We need each other. We can help each other. Let's explore ways to help each other seek Him more closely!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 7)

Scripture: 1st Corinthians 1:10-12

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 19th, 2006

Following by Basic Friendliness

1 Corinthians 1:10-12 (NASB)

¹⁰ Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. ¹² Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

Introduction I have a question for you today: Do you think that we are we a friendly church? If a newcomer visits our church, does anyone speak with them? If there is a gathering, and someone who has not attended that gathering goes for the first time, does anyone speak with that person? Once a newcomer HAS been spoken to, are their needs explored, and are they offered warmth and conversation? If they are a little quiet at first, are they then drawn out with some effort? With a new person, is anyone aware of them and are they pursued at all after their first visit? Is there any follow-up? These are questions we are facing right now because we have many newcomers and many new and interesting people around us here. One couple lived through the Nazi occupation of Norway, all five years. Another individual is a world traveler and has visited many interesting places. Another newcomer grew up in California and went to college there. Several newcomers are very lonely and are trying out our church to see if there is anyone here who would become their friend. A number of teenagers are being brought here by our teens—they're wondering, "Is Jesus real? Is there anything TO this Christianity stuff?"

I have a second question for you: **Do you think that by hanging out with Jesus, the disciples became more friendly than what they were naturally?** If Peter was a boisterous, self-focused man who loved to turn a conversation towards his own interests, did he become less so as the three years with Jesus progressed? If Mary Magdalene was introverted and quiet, as she spent time with Jesus, did she come out of her shell a little? If Thomas was an

argumentative person, did he become a better listener as He got to know Jesus? As we log in more time as disciples of the invisible Jesus, do WE become more loving? More specifically, do we become friendlier?

I'm asking this question because it comes up in the context of our Christian walk. I am concerned mainly this morning with **HERE**, and how well we enfold newcomers to our church. But it has relevance in your **neighborhoods**, in the **schools** where your children attend, at your **workplace**. We SAY we know Jesus Christ, that we serve Him, that we want to hear His voice, that we want to do His will. We say to the community around us that Jesus is the most awesome focus that there is. We sing a lot, and buy CDs and .mp3s and go to concerts, which celebrate Jesus Christ.

Does our pursuit of Him change our basic friendliness, and **how** does that really matter?

Will people from outside our church body, when they come into here, see a people who look like they've been hanging out with Jesus Christ?

Do they find a group that is warm and receptive and interested in them, the way it is safe to say that Jesus was?

It is really, an ancient question. And I think we have a good "biblical undercarriage" and support for working on basic friendliness...

In what we know as "First Corinthians" (which is really 2nd Corinthians, because he refers to a previous letter which is not extant), the apostle Paul FIRST thanks God for the Christians in the city of Corinth. In 1:4-7 we read, ***I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ...*** Paul was grateful for at least *one* really prosperous and filled-up church. But then he points out the first of many problems and questions about that church—namely, that there were ***quarrels among*** them, specifically, that they were in danger of being divided up behind various favorite leaders (***Paul, Apollos, Cephas*** and even ***Christ***.) You will notice his wish for them (vs.10c) ***that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment***. Paul urged his original readers to unite in their thinking. The Greek word *katartizo*, translated "made complete," describes the mending of nets in Mark 1:19. He wanted them to take the same view of things, to have the same mind (cf. Phil. 2:2), and to experience unanimity in their judgment of what they needed to do.¹ I think this assumes a basic atmosphere of friendliness in a church, which is a pretty serious thing. Today we're not talking about the whole problem of division in the body of Christ, but this one specific and really simple aspect: basic friendliness.

I wish I could say for sure what were the exact effects that Jesus had on the disciples' friendliness. I know this—

They got a vision to tell more people about Jesus and they would not get too far in THAT mission if they were UNfriendly.

I know that as they traveled across the empire they needed other Christians to practice hospitality, which strongly implies real friendliness (Hebrews 13:2).

I know that during some very intense discussions BETWEEN the apostles when they were consolidating their doctrine and some of the details about how they were going to deal with large numbers of Gentile Christians coming in, they needed to practice friendliness with EACH OTHER.

I know that when the apostle Paul was thinking about the new Christian church near Ephesus, which would involve Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians getting along together, something which came to his mind was the fact that the Lord Jesus ***broke down the barrier of the dividing wall*** between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14).

I know that he also wrote to the Roman believers that they should be (KJV) ***Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another*** (12:10).

Now, Does Jesus Christ make a person more affable? Does He work within us to draw us out a little? Does He transform my own focus so I'm not just interested in myself all the time? Does He give me some sincere interest in people that I don't really know very well?

The friendliest pastor I ever met—and believe me, I have met many—was clearly RICHARD BEWES. Richard is rector-emeritus of All Souls Church in London. When our friend Caroline introduced me to him after the service near the door of the church, he looked right into my eyes, almost felt like *through* me, and made me feel very welcome. As he grasped my hands with both of his, he was not in a hurry, asked a couple of questions about where I was from and what I did. I have never been more warmly greeted. Although I was only there for one Sunday, I really wanted to go back!

But friendliness in a church needs to extend beyond the pastor. It is an opportunity to practice what Jesus called the “second great command,” to ***love your neighbor as yourself***. When it comes to relating to people, or being in a new place, how do YOU like to be treated? Most of us would enjoy some acknowledgement of our presence in that place.

- We would not mind if someone came over and **introduced themselves**.
- We might even like it if they **asked our name**, and **where we're from**, and **said something kind** to us.

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- If I was new, I might not even mind if someone handed me some kind of **visitor's card** *personally*. I think, in fact, that I would like that a little *more* than just pulling one out of a pew.
 - I LIKE to receive some personal contact, and so it seems reasonable that others might too.
 - I might EVEN not mind it if I got a **friendly call or a note** from someone in the church *other* than the pastor...
- How can I grant them MORE of this?

I've got a little acrostic for you today: R-E-A-C-H. If we "reach" out of our "comfort zone," just a little, we might be greatly blessed! The word "reach" stands for

- ♦ **R**emember when *you* were new. And work at treating people like you enjoy being treated. That eliminates a number of things, too. It eliminates ignoring them, or on the other hand talking too much AT them or lecturing them about their health, commenting on their appearance, asking too many nosy questions, or anything too personal about their children. How did YOU like to be met? Do that to them.
- ♦ **E**vangelism begins with a good introduction. There is a steady flow of people in and out of this church these days, and I know some are not really Christians yet. The impression we make is important because a good introduction can win us the possibility sometimes to share the Gospel.
- ♦ **A**uthentic interest. Here is an important thing: HAVE genuine interest. I didn't say "pretend" to be interested when you're not. That wouldn't be genuine, would it? But I have found that most people are really quite interesting. I love learning about people when they first come into our church. You would be amazed at some of the stories I have heard! But showing *authentic* interest is really important. Give that person LONG enough in answering your question, to give you an answer. Don't shift your eyes off to another person—the worst is when its one of your friends—and then ignore the first person! Sometimes we have to be very DELIBERATE to give the new person our full attention and not become distracted. (This is what Richard Bewes did with me, so well.)
- ♦ **C**ontact with your eyes. Look them right in the eye. Don't burn a hole in them with a stare, but engage them eye to eye. We don't do this when we're nervous or unsure of ourselves, but we can get over that! Eye contact also communicates interest and giving them your full attention.

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- ♦ Help in any way you can. Part of demonstrating authentic interest and a loving approach is to become aware or even “scanning” for some way you can help the new person. Could they use a brochure about our church? Would they like to know where the Sunday School class relevant to them or their kids might be located? Would they like to know the location of the bathrooms? Would they like to meet the Pastor or the youth minister or the secretary? Do they need a bulletin? LOOK for ways to help them in any way they might need help. This is a big part of friendliness.

People say various things about DBC when they first come here. Some find us just fine in the friendliness department. Others say we are hard to get to warm up to. We know that we cannot please everyone—for some we can never be friendly enough; for others we are ALREADY too friendly. But the key principle today is to **ALWAYS TREAT OTHERS THE WAY YOU LIKE TO BE TREATED**. A very small number of us WANT to be ignored. And if you *are* like that, and you wish absolutely no one to bother you or speak to you or even look at you, week after week, by all means keep doing that yourself. Most of us want a little more acknowledgement than that. Most of us NEED a little more than that. We need this place to be friendly and pleasant and generally cheerful. We have much ministry to do in the coming months. We need every person the Lord sends us and we owe it to our Savior to enfold them well. I am convinced it is a part of our discipleship that we need to work on in the next year. May the Lord pour His love out THROUGH us.

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.
Proverbs 27:9 (NASB)

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 8)
Scripture: Luke 18:1-14
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: December 3rd, 2006

Following by Prayer

Luke 18:1-14 (NASB)

¹ NOW He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, ² saying, “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. ³ “And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ ⁴ “And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge ⁷ said; ⁸ now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? ⁹ “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” ¹⁰ And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹¹ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. ¹² “The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. ¹³ I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ ¹⁴ “But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁵ “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Introduction We are seeking to spell out the basic things—activities, characteristics—of what makes a person a “disciple” of Jesus Christ. I suspect there are many who want to call themselves “Christians,” and who do so, but who are not especially interested in *going deeper*, or in *exploring* what it means to follow Jesus Christ, personally. In this series, we are interested in knowing what it really means to follow Christ. And we can go no further in our consideration of “discipleship” for a Christian before we add in PRAYER as a basic activity for all followers of Jesus Christ.

To say something about prayer from a global perspective, about the wider community... I think everyone WISHES prayer made sense and wish that God heard them when they pray. That is why people from Buddhist monks to

Catholic nuns to Russian priests to Presidents and warriors and terrorists and surgeons and teachers and children and old people in nursing homes call out for God... They want to believe He hears, He cares and He might answer. Prayer is a universal wish of many people. They want to tell God what they wish Him to do. They sometimes want to move Him with confession or with praise. They might even wish to impress Him in some way. Sometimes they think that if they pray certain words, enough times in a row, and in the proper sequences, prayer will act like a PIN or a password and gain them entrance into the grace of God. In Hinduism all sorts of complicated prayer systems are used from fire-based rituals to philosophical musings. Muslims pray five times each day and they are supposed to do so, facing Mecca.

Christians say they know something reliable about prayer. They say that when they pray, they are going through someone they call their “great High Priest,” whom they say is none other than Jesus Christ and designated as such by God, in covenant with Himself. They say that because they trust in Him, their prayers are heard, cared about and answered. In fact, Christians often say that they even pray with enjoyment, not just out of duty. They say, that praying makes a difference. And they say, that praying is a basic part of their following Jesus, though they are still doing this invisibly and by faith.

When I first became a Christian I was introduced to an illustration from the Navigators (who discipled me) about following Jesus--called “the Wheel Illustration,” which depicted the Christian life as a wheel with four spokes. The “Wheel” had two VERTICAL spokes, relating to the Christian’s relationship with God (prayer and the Word) and two HORIZONTAL spokes, relating to his relationship with other people (fellowship and witnessing.) With Christ as the center of my life, and all four “spokes” happening, my life is working in obedience to Christ and rolls along, balanced and productive. We will look at all four spokes in this series but it is will look at all four spokes in this series but it is that vertical spokes of prayer that we want to consider a little about today. Prayer is where we communicate to God and listen to Him, too.

Let me say that if nothing else, a Christian who is seeking to know the Lord better and to follow Jesus Christ is going to be a person who DOES pray, and who works at learning more and more about prayer. Prayer is talking to GOD WITH THE CONFIDENCE that He hears me. It involves PRAISE AND ADORATION. It involves CONFESSION. It involves ASKING God. It can involve USING SCRIPTURE, not in some kind of mechanical way, but using the thoughts of the writers of the Bible to help us TALK TO GOD. But ultimately, I believe prayer is just talking to God and telling Him whatever, and everything that is on our minds. We need to think of it as talking, communication, and with an openness and

unication, and with an openness and unguardedness.

Jesus taught quite a bit about prayer and in Luke 18 He told two stories, or parables, that related to prayer. Luke says, He was telling them a parable to show that AT ALL TIMES they ought to pray and not to lose heart (vs. 1.) Already in Luke's introducing this section we get some good information about prayer. First, prayer is ALWAYS appropriate. God invites and is ready to receive our prayer at all times. I find great comfort in that. Perhaps because I have the basic personality that would fear that perhaps God gets tired of us, or gets worn out with us, Luke tells us that Jesus wanted the disciples to be men of frequent and fervent prayer. He told stories to motivate that quality. You and I need to be people of prayer, too. We need to know that we CAN pray at all times, and that we NEED to pray at all times. We also need to balance this with what Jesus had said earlier-- And when you are praying, do not use **meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.** (Matthew 6:7) If you are interested in following Jesus Christ and in discipleship you WILL be interested in learning frequent prayer. If you are not interested in prayer, it doesn't mean you're not a Christian. It means you're not too interested in really learning how to follow Him.
too interested in really learning how to follow Him.

And then Luke gives the other nod to how things are: as Peter and James and Mary were, WE TOO are prone to lose heart. We send out an "SOS" and sometimes we feel that all we get back *on the* radio is white noise. We ask God for something once, and we find that we have to wait, and we get discouraged. Or, we DO wait on God, we DO trust, and still the desired response doesn't turn out exactly as we wish, and we can get despressed. This parable that Jesus gave them aimed at that—and the Lord does not want discouragement to defeat us. Do not lose heart. Do not give up. Kke the **unrighteous judge**, we do not have to BOTHER God, but **God will bring about justice for His elect** and He will do so **speedily**. The question is not, can God be trusted, but shall we remain faithful until the end?

Notice the little word **elect**. The "elect" is a biblical expression referring to a fixed number of souls who have been predestined by the sovereign God for salvation and it includes all true Christians. And Jesus said it is for God's *elect* that this promise applies. If that seems unfair to you, remember that absolute fairness would mean NO ONE would receive mercy because everyone is desperately sinful. God loves the whole world, as His creation, but Jesus indicates that justice and answered prayer is promised for the **elect**. Are you in God's elect? If you are truly a Christian, you are.

The second parable is a stark contrast between an arrogant Pharisee and a broken tax-collector. You will notice that Luke tells us that this parable isn't aimed at the disciples—it is aimed at ***certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt.*** Let's get the obvious application first: we should NEVER trust in our own righteousness. And we should never look down at other people, with the sneer of “you're disgusting.” There are definitely people around who do both of those things, back in Jesus' day, and now too. Some of those people happen to go to churches, too. Nothing can be more ironic! This story that Jesus now tells is crafted for them—it draws a marked contrast between a self-righteous Pharisee, and a completely self-effacing tax-collector. The professional religious person has his confidence before God and his focus placed on his self, on the things HE has done for God. The tax-collector is so completely ashamed of himself that he is sure God is displeased with him and all he can croak out, is ***God, be merciful to me, the sinner.*** I am sure that when Jesus told this story He was thinking of real Pharisees and real tax-collectors He knew. Maybe even Matthew! But the contrast is plain—self-righteousness does not impress God. Humility and a realistic confession of our status before a holy God does mark someone as ELIGIBLE for God's grace. Notice how Jesus summed up the contrast: the tax-collector ***went down to his house JUSTIFIED rather than the other*** (vs. 14). And then, ***everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.*** That is totally a great rule for life. And in prayer first of all, we should always have a humble view of ourselves.

So to summarize what we can take away here:

- God hears, and He cares and He vindicates (brings justice).
- But He is not impressed with self-righteousness, and He expects His disciples to be truly humble.

A couple of other observations about prayer:

I find that many are afraid to pray out loud. If that is because you are afraid of seeming proud or of losing your focus on who you're talking to—God, not the people listening—that is probably fine. Praying out loud is not a sacrament! But know that when we pray out loud it blesses your brothers and sisters. We should be sensitive to not doing it too long, or to have our “quiet tim someone *else* pray for that one. But praying out loud is one of the ways we LEARN to pray, by hearing others do it.

Also, study the prayers of the apostles for the THINGS they prayed about. Work at aligning your prayer lives with the kind of prayer requests that the Bible really endorses. We tend to spend so much time on comfort and convenience

and healing issues and neglecting the things that the Bible emphasizes in prayer. I believe much of our prayer time together should be focused on praise and thanksgiving, and praying for missionaries and the advancement of the Gospel and only THEN do we go to prayer for healings and stress management and job success. We should also pray together a great deal about our children and THEIR spiritual lives.

I recommend that you get a little notebook and begin to write down your prayer experiences. Have a couple of lists in it—things you're praying about or people you're praying for regularly. Have a place to write down any journal-type entries, experiences, things that come to mind WHEN you're praying.

If we accomplish nothing else, I hope our church becomes a church where people are encouraged, mentored, and regularly instructed about how to pray. God wants us to pray and to seek His face. He promises all through the Bible to meet us in prayer. Consider these words as we conclude:

I CRY aloud with my voice to the LORD; I make supplication with my voice to the LORD. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him.

Psalm 142:1-2 (NASB)

Answer me quickly, O LORD, my spirit fails; Do not hide Thy face from me,
Lest I become like those who go down to the pit. Let me hear Thy
lovingkindness in the morning; For I trust in Thee; Teach me the way in
which I should walk; For to Thee I lift up my soul.

Psalm 143:7-8

I WILL extol Thee, my God, O King; And I will bless Thy name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless Thee, And I will praise Thy name forever and ever.

Psalm 145:1-2

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 9)

Scripture: Hebrews 4:8-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: December 10th, 2006

Following by Listening

Hebrews 4:8-16 (NASB)

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. ⁹ There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through *following* the same example of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. ¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Introduction I remember at ten years old, receiving my first **Boy Scout Handbook**. For a ten year old it seemed pretty daunting—rules and principles of camping, field cooking, citizenship, first aid, swimming, lifesaving, soil and water conservation as well as teamwork, personal integrity and drive and achievement. I remember feeling quite comforted by the idea that life can be ordered, skills to be acquired mapped out and measured. There was always in my home a low-level chaos simmering, and the suggestion that life CAN have a healthy kind of structure and predictability to it was intriguing to me as a ten year old. The Boy Scout handbook suggested, “Here’s a happy plan; here’s some things you can learn, and some skills you can acquire which will make you a better person.” The Scout oath was appealing to, to my ten year old mind...

On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

At twenty-three and in my first weeks in the time I worked as an engineering consultant for the Navy, I was handed a manual for the project I was working on, and told to read it and become familiarized with the contents. It was

the specification manual for the Mk-60 **CAPTOR**, encapsulated torpedo mine. I felt a little intimidated by the manual which seemed to assume I knew more than I did (at 23), as I tried to digest the details and data of the project that I now found myself working on.

But the most important manual I have ever encountered has been the **Bible**, the Scriptures, the written Word of God. In the midst of a somewhat involved plea for the readers to NOT forfeit their full future inheritance¹ the writer to the Hebrews said this:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This verse is the first reason why a disciple who wants to really follow Jesus is going to be a person who is “in” the Word, who reads the Bible, or at least listens to it being read. The Word of God is the main means by which we hear the voice of God in our Christian lives. From the verse, you can see FIVE THINGS about how it works in believers’ lives:

LIVING – the Word of God is living, because God is living

ACTIVE – it is energetic and powerful. It is not just the words of people.

SHARP – it is sharper than a scalpel or any sword. In fact the word for **word** often referred to a small knife used for boning meat.

PIERCING – it can get down in a person’s heart and mind to the deepest parts. The soul and spirit are almost indistinguishable but the Word can even probe and explore to the deepest part of a person’s conscience.

ABLE TO JUDGE – its effect is to *evaluate* us. What the author is saying is that God’s Word can reach to the innermost recesses of our being.

“We must not think that we can bluff our way out of anything, for there are no secrets hidden from God. We cannot keep our thoughts to ourselves.¹”

If we are NOT in the Word, we forfeit this presence of God in our lives. The Spirit of God wants to use His Word—not to condemn us but to strengthen us and cause us to grow...

A second reason a disciple needs to be in the Word is because it is life-giving and life-renewing. Paul wrote to Timothy in 2nd Tim.3:16,17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The Bible is a GOOD thing—we have it, and knowing it and understanding it, and building it into our lives is **profitable**. God has “breathed” His life into His Word and it is HIM speaking to us, when we read it. It causes people to understand Him, and His ways; it brings conviction of error when people stray; It is helpful for correction (bringing restoration to the truth when there has been error) and training in righteousness (child-training type guidance in the ways of right living that God’s truth reveals). And this is only a selective, rather than an exhaustive list of the ways in which the Scriptures are useful.¹

When it comes to raising children, we have no better tool than to expose our children, explain to our children and even to drill our children on the Word of God. We are losing this priority, I fear. We find importance in soccer, and football and dance and music and making money and all kinds of otherwise good things and we crowd out the instruction of our kids in the Word. In a family dedication we are signing on to making a commitment to place the teaching of the Word FIRST in our kids lives, as parents in the home and as providers for our kids throughout the short years they are with us. It grieves my mind with the things we let short-circuit this promise so many of us have made when our kids were young.

A third thing to see about the Word, is to see it as part of “the Wheel” illustration. Bible-reading does not exist in a vacuum. It goes hand-in-hand with prayer, fellowship and sharing our faith. Getting into the Word, and getting the Word into you enlivens and enables your sense of real fellowship. It is the partner of prayer and it is the guide and database for witnessing. You NEED the Word in order to really engage the other three “spokes” in your walk.

There are so many ways TO get into the Word. In your bulletin today is a simple and somewhat unique Bible-reading plan for reading the whole New Testament by one year from now.

You can obtain the Word on .mp3 or on CD and listen to it in your car or while you’re walking.

You can attend a small group where the Word is studied and get exposed to it “in community.” I recommend Bill Stack’s coming DIBS course on how we got our Bible and how to interpret it.

You can memorize verses that really speak to you, or work on a systematic plan of memorization.

ANYTHING to get the Word into your life.

You may say, “It’s hard to understand” and some of it surely is. But much of it is not hard to understand and the KEY is to realize you’re not in a race or a competition with anyone. Do it in which ever manner or style or pace that works for you. The main thing is to just DO it. Get the Word into your life.

The Lord will speak to you through His Word. I believe He delights to do so. If you are a Christian you will “hear” Him. In the months before I really found Christ I tried to read the Bible because I wanted to prove I was a Christian. It made little sense to me at that time because I wasn’t a Christian yet. Once you really HAVE found Christ the Word comes alive. You still interpret it intelligently and you work at that skill; but it is like a good meal. It is nutritious. It tastes good, even when it is convicting.

If you are not in the Word much do not be surprised if your spiritual life seems dead or lifeless. It SHOULD be. We are meant to become strong in the Word and this is a thing we should pray for, for our children.

May God enable us and give us a great hunger for His Word. It is the core of life for us, the foundation of why we exist as a church, the hope of the future and the channel for receiving a great amount of grace and love from God.

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 10)
Scripture: Luke 2:33,39,40
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: December 17th, 2006

The Strange Following of Joseph and Mary

Luke 2:21-40 (NASB)

²¹ And when eight days were completed before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. ²² And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “EVERY *first-born* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD”), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES, OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.” ²⁵ And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, ²⁸ then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹ “Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bond-servant depart In peace, according to Thy word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Thy salvation, ³¹ Which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Thy people Israel.” ³³ **And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.** ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed— ³⁵ **and a sword will pierce even your own soul**—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” ³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. And she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. ³⁸ And at that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, **they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.** ⁴⁰ And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Introduction Were Joseph and Mary real people? What were they like? How old were they? What did they look like? What would their lives have looked like if God has NOT chosen them to be whom He did? What were their parents like? How long did they live? Where did they die? What was their favorite food? How did they dress? In Nativity scenes, Joseph and Mary always seem to just be there... Standing, or sitting, and looking at Jesus. All my life I have felt a certain dissatisfaction with how they are artistically depicted. They are, The Holy Parents and as such, they are “automaton,” a little unreal... just sitting there, staring at baby Jesus. I don’t want them to just be that way! I want them to be real. I’m sure they exhausted, and content to just rest, as shepherds approached. I don’t know if they were in awe of the “dawn of redeeming grace,” or if they would “lend their aid to, with us, sing our Savior’s birth.” In fact I’m not sure how MUCH of Who their baby was, that they understood. But I’m interested, for today’s purposes, to think about how their relationship

transitioned from being flabbergasted parents, to becoming genuine disciples of their son, which I am calling today, “THE STRANGE FOLLOWING OF JOSEPH AND MARY,” strange because their call to follow Him would be completely different than anyone else’s... A scriptural survey, that speaks of Joseph and Mary:

- And Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took her as his wife and kept her as a virgin until she gave birth to a son and he called His name Jesus... Matthew 1:24,25 Joseph’s life would never be the same. His discipleship begins in **obedience** to God. We know very little about Joseph but we do know that he as an honorable and God-obeying man. He did three things in obedience: he remained loyal to his betrothed wife; He maintained her virginity until she gave birth and he used the name he had been told to use: Jesus.
- And He arose and took the child and His mother and departed by night for Egypt... Matt. 2:14 He fled his country with few possessions. In order to save his son and wife he was **willing to relocate**—I’m sure, a scary venture.
- And he arose and took the child and His mother and came into the land of Israel... Matt. 2:21 Once there, he then was willing to **undergo the exertion if nothing else, of relocating back** to Galilee.
- But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart... Luke 2:19 A beautiful expression for what was going on in a mother’s heart. She **noted everything in the scrapbook** of her own heart and mind.
- And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him... vs. 33 Here is a telling comment—they were certainly not smug. The very son they would raise, was already known to some. His reputation preceded Him and they could not get over the wonder of proximity to the Messiah.
- ...and a sword will pierce even your own soul [Mary]... vs. 35 Simeon’s prophecy about Jesus revealed that Mary would not be without pain or anguish. As the agony of a sword piercing, Mary would never be the same. From obscurity to becoming possibly the most famous woman in the world, she would bear an **agony** culminated on that day at the foot of her son’s cross. Her own discipleship would take her there.
- And they did not understand the statement which he had made to them... vs. 50 Being in the dark was something Joseph and Mary had to get used to. At 12 Jesus was hungry to be “in His Father’s house.” They could not understand what that meant. Being His disciple registered them in **a frequent program of learning**.
- And His mother treasured all these things in her heart. vs. 51b Again Luke tells us that Mary, even though she must have been overwhelmed often with the things Jesus said and did, and how others reacted to Him, she stored up her memories and cherished the unfolding picture, we are sure, of who Jesus really was!
- And His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” John 2:5 WhatEVER Jesus was going to do about the low stock of good wine, she knew it would be good. Do what He says, was her rule. It is the core of discipleship: trusting obedience.
- While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him... Matthew 12:46 Sometimes Mary and family would have to wait. Not to make too much of this, but there was a certain humbling to following Jesus by that point. They could not demand immediate attention as family members.
- But there were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother,

“Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household. John 20:25b-27 Here is the piercing of the heart as with a sword. To watch her own son be executed, to suffer and to die—surely this is what Simeon had meant and even foreseen, so many years before. Mary was faithful to following her Son, even to follow Him to Calvary.

- These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Acts 1:14 One might wish far more information about Mary than what we have. This scrap of information is informative, though. Following Jesus prescribed a lifestyle of prayer. This is the final mention of Mary in the New Testament. Tradition has it that she finished her life in Ephesus, in the company of John the apostle.

So, there are some observations about how Joseph and Mary “followed” Jesus, that can talk to us, I think.

First, following Him meant **transitioning** from raising Him to following Him. Maybe this is the strangest part of what Joseph and Mary’s discipleship involved. They watched Him emerge from babyhood to boyhood, to being a teenager, to twentysomething and then to the launch of His ministry at about thirty years old.

We know nothing about Joseph, after Jesus as 12. He disappears from the record and most scholars assume he died after that. But until that point he must have often been amazed at his eldest son. By that time he surely would have known that Jesus was unique and that he, Joseph, had been given a great privilege. He must have had some of the feeling of John the Baptist, “He must increase and I must decrease.” Mary would live out a full life, though, and she would spend most of her years *remembering* Jesus. She raised Him, watched Him die, and then rise again from the dead, and then she would find herself among His closest disciples and watching the spread of a whole new faith—a faith built upon her own son. I can only imagine her often saying, “Will someone please pinch me?”

Joseph’s and Mary’s first demonstration of discipleship, is the task of change. A disciple—even if he or she doesn’t particularly like it—accepts change. Not a brutal kind of instability, but a sense of change as the call of God challenges us and shows us how His kingdom is spreading and changing people. In John 21:18-19 we read where Jesus said to Peter, “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”¹⁹ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, “Follow Me!” Perhaps one of the greatest hindrances to spiritual growth is the basic human resistance to change. Jesus

guaranteed change and transition to Peter. This leads into a second observation from Joseph and Mary:

Raising Him/Following Him meant **subordinating their natural inclinations**--they were His parents. Naturally, they would want Him near and safe. They knew that they had to let go. They knew they had to trust God with this unique son, God's Son first. The apostle Paul grieved the lack of disciples, at one point, who he could really commend to the Philippians... Philippians 2:20-21 ***For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.***

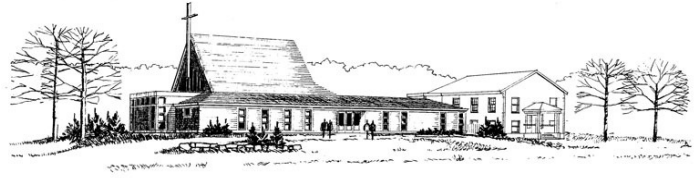
Third, following Him meant **some danger**. As they were threatened by Herod and others, they had to relocate to Egypt. We're not told specifically, but even Egypt would involve some risk. Protecting Jesus won them significant risk. Sometimes still, discipleship could involve danger. I don't think we're supposed to go out looking for trouble or to be foolhardy, but when following Him clearly imposes risk, we accept that and get on with things... Romans 8:38-39 ***For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

Fourth, following Him meant **some emotional pain**. Here is a thing we seem to be going to great ends in Christian circles to avoid, recover from, insulate ourselves from and talk ourselves out of: emotional pain. Now, I don't like pain. But sometimes following Christ—as Joseph and Mary learned—could involve some pain. Philippians 3:8 ***More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ...*** Do you know WHY Jesus Christ came to the world? It wasn't to fulfill Joseph and Mary's needs for a family, their self-esteem or to teach cool principles about how we should all be nice to people. He came to die. He was *born* to die—to become a living sacrifice for the sins of the world. If Joseph and Mary didn't know that early, Mary at least surely learned it by His baptism, because John the Baptist announced Him as the ***lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.***

Last, following Him meant **expecting the unexpected**. Many of us use the expression, "I don't like surprises." We like to see what's coming. But the life of following Christ involves turns in the road along the way. Joseph and Mary saw their lives completely changed. Mary ends up, tradition has it, in Ephesus,

across the Mediterranean from her homeland, in a strange culture. Each disciple ends up living a completely different life from what they would have predicted. Some even died young, for Christ. Following Jesus involves a way of living of seeking God daily, or often, and watching Him unfold a plan for your life where He is in charge. He intends to use us. He intends to change us. It doesn't mean that every person has to move away. But it means that when the Spirit is guiding your life and speaking to you, you can expect many new things and new ministries to unfold for you.

Our Christmas celebrations major so much on tradition and predictability and family activities. But Joseph and Mary really represent very little of that. Their discipleship involved a lot of change and sacrifice. It involved responsibility. One couldn't be closer to Jesus or have known Him better than Mary did. But that closeness would pierce her soul. Those feelings were never feelings of despair—for in following Jesus there is ALWAYS a future to look forward to. I look forward to seeing the look on Mary's face in heaven. And on Joseph's. They were His first disciples, and will delight to join with us all in praise and adoration at the marriage feast of the Lamb!



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 11)

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: December 24th, 2006

When Pagans Seek Jesus

Matthew 2:1-12 (NASB)

NOW after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.” ³ And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he *began* to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ And they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, ⁶ ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER, WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’” ⁷ Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, “Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him.” ⁹ And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. ¹⁰ And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.

Introduction Isn't it fascinating and wonderful when a new person really finds Christ? And people come to Christ from all kinds of backgrounds. Sometimes it is the **person who was raised around Christianity**, but didn't really believe, and then does. Sometimes it is the **down-and-outer**, who is in the bottom of the pit in his life, out of options, beaten down, addicted to one thing or another, a slave to sin. Sometimes it is the **random, normal-living** (whatever *that* is) and average, person with no dramatic circumstances, going about life pretty anonymously, and BANG! He or she wakes up one morning to discover this new and wild and a little unsettling FAITH in their hearts; faith in Jesus Christ. They look in the mirror and go, “You're different. Something has happened!”

And *sometimes* the person who finds Christ is a “pagan”—a completely unchurched individual--of great public significance. We have read today of the magi, who came from “the east.” These “wise men” (KJV, NLT), appearing in Matthew 2:1-12, **followed a star** to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem in order to pay homage to the newborn “king of the Jews.” Matthew’s account forms a significant introduction to his Gospel by drawing attention to the true identity of Jesus as King and by foreshadowing the homage paid by the Gentiles to Jesus throughout that Gospel.

Extrabiblical evidence offers various clues that shed light on the place of origin and positions held by the magi of Matthew 2. The historian Herodotus mentioned magi as a priestly caste of Media, or Persia, and, as the religion in Persia at the time was Zoroastrinism, Herodotus’s magi were probably Zoroastrian priests. Herodotus, together with Plutarch and Strabo, suggested that magi were partly responsible for ritual and cultic life (supervising sacrifices and prayers) and partly responsible as royal advisers to the courts of the East. Believing the affairs of history were reflected in the movements of the stars and other phenomena, Herodotus said, the rulers of the East commonly utilized the magi’s knowledge of astrology and dream interpretation to determine affairs of state. The magi were, therefore, concerned with what the movement of the stars (as signs and portents) might signify for the future affairs of history. Such an interest could account not only for the magi’s interest in the star in Matthew, but also their conclusion, shared with Herod, that the star’s appearance signified the birth of a new ruler of great importance (2:2). Several centuries before Christ, a similar correlation was noted between a stellar phenomenon and the birth of Alexander the Great.¹

Matthew tells us a certain amount about these men. He does *not* tell us how many there were. They are often depicted as three, which is assumed from the fact, as Matthew tells us, that there were three gifts brought to Jesus. We do not know their names, though traditionally they are Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar (7th century Latin patristics); the Syrians have Larvandad, Hormisdas, Gushnasaph.¹ They came from **the east**.¹ And they followed a star, we read. I have no problem with God ordaining a special celestial phenomena for this most special of occasions. He had ordained a flood, a sea creature, world-covering darkness and is creator of all that is. A single star, would be no problem.

The visit of the magi plays a significant role in introducing Matthew’s Gospel. From the beginning it reveals the true identity of the infant as the long-expected and prophesied royal Messiah of Israel. This is brought out first in the appearance of the “star,” which carried clear messianic connotations: “a star shall come forth out of Jacob, a scepter shall arise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17; see also Isaiah 60:3). Second, the interchange between the magi, Herod, and the

chief priests and scribes (Matthew 2:2-6) reveals that Jesus is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy of Micah 5:2, the ruler of Israel coming from the small village of Bethlehem. Third, the offering of the gifts (Matthew 2:11) may also echo the possible messianic promises of Psalms 68:29 and 72:10.¹

Numbers 24:17

“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, And a scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth.

Isaiah 60:3

“And nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.

Micah 5:2

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.*”

Psalms 68:29

Because of Thy temple at Jerusalem Kings will bring gifts to Thee.

Psalms 72:10

Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.

What we see, is a sovereign God who graciously calls people out of darkness and into the light of His Son. These men, acting on Jewish prophecies uttered hundreds of years earlier—and knew these Jewish prophecies—combined with the astrology and curiosity innate to their positions, sought out this new King. God wonderfully calls people, sometimes people in high places... The apostle Peter wrote of Christians that we are

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light 1 Peter 2:9

In the Book of Daniel there is the record of how God humbled King **NEBUCHADNEZZAR**¹ in the 6th century before Jesus was born, brought him low, and then evidently gave him faith to believe. In our own times we have read with wonder how **MITSUO FUCHIDA**¹--the commander of the three hundred strong Japanese air strike force over Pearl Harbor, came to faith in 1949, four years after the end of the war. He, himself, became a Christian missionary in 1952 (the year I was born) and ministered the Gospel until his death in 1976.

We have felt joy to watch the maturing and AUTHENTICATING of the Christian testimony of a man who was probably the fourth most powerful man in the United States, **CHUCK COLSON**¹. During the Watergate scandal Colson was humbled and brought low, and he found Christ through the writings of C.S. Lewis, (himself a one-time atheist) and the friendship of Tom Phillips, CEO of The

Raytheon Company. And more recently, actress **JANE FONDA**¹ writes of finding herself hungry for faith and indeed finding faith in Jesus Christ not too long ago.

The magi from the east represent how God's Spirit draws people, woos their hearts, calls them and then finally fills their hearts with faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. After Matthew 2, we read no more of the magi in the Bible, nor does history give us much about them. They went home to Persia to no church. We don't even know if they—however many there were, whether 2 or 12—saw each other again. But their journey to faith, or at least their flirting with faith, is recorded to us by Matthew, and started out with the barest minimum of data to go on...

God is still calling people to the Savior. He is calling people from WITHIN Christian families. His work engages what LOOKs like random, normal people and they wake up amazed at themselves—they don't say, "Hey, I've become religious!" They just feel **faith** in their hearts. And sometimes the Gospel grabs someone famous, someone important in society. He can use them significantly.

Essentially, we're all born "pagans." We are not born with Christ in our hearts. And Christmas is about Jesus Christ, make no mistake about it. He blazes as the God-man as a baby, as a dying Savior and as a Risen King. He will come again as a conquering sovereign, to set up His kingdom, of which you will be part, if you have embraced Him by faith.

¹ *Illumina Gold*

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09527a.htm>

¹ East of Palestine, only ancient Media, Persia, Assyria, and Babylonia had a Magian priesthood at the time of the birth of Christ. From some such part of the Parthian Empire the Magi came. They probably crossed the Syrian Desert, lying between the Euphrates and Syria, reached either Haleb (Aleppo) or Tudmor (Palmyra), and journeyed on to Damascus and southward, by what is now the great Mecca route (*darb elhaj*, "the pilgrim's way"), keeping the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan to their west till they crossed the ford near Jericho. We have no tradition of the precise land meant by "the east". It is Babylon, according to St. Maximus (Homil. xviii in Epiphani.); and Theodotus of Ancyra (Homil. de Nativitate, I, x); Persia, according to Clement of Alexandria (Strom., I xv) and St. Cyril of Alexandria (In Is., xlix, 12); Arabia, according to St. Justin (Cont. Tryphon., lxxvii), Tertullian (Adv. Jud., ix), and St. Epiphanius (Expos. fidei, viii).

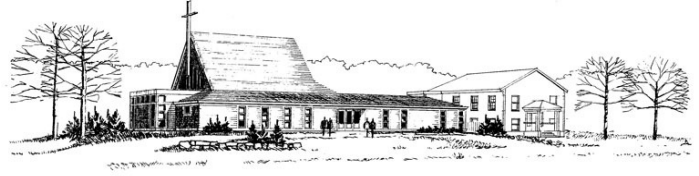
¹ *Illumina Gold*, *ibid.*

¹ <http://www.allabouttruth.org/king-nebuchadnezzar-faq.htm>

¹ <http://www.biblebelievers.com/fuchida1.html>

¹ <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/colson/general.htm>

¹ http://www.beliefnet.com/story/165/story_16529_1.html



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 12)

Scripture: Philippians 3

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 14th, 2007

Should Grow, Can Grow, Will Grow

Philippians 3:7-14

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Introduction In a nutshell it went like this: the guys met Jesus, and they either did or didn't **follow Him**. Some did. Others didn't. (Judas did for three years, then...didn't...) As they followed Him around Judea, they **learned** some things.

- ♦ They learned how to treat each other.
- ♦ They learned how to help hurting people, some of whom were desparately damaged or even demon-possessed.
- ♦ They learned the true meaning of the Bible because teaching them the Bible was something Jesus loved to do with them.
- ♦ They learned how to pray.
- ♦ They learned to trust God, even when it wasn't easy to trust God.

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- ♦ They watched Jesus, they listened to Him, they processed what they were seeing and hearing and they learned.

As they learned various things and watched Jesus do kingdom ministry, they found themselves **making certain decisions**. Sometimes the decisions were clear-cut and dramatic choices like whether to speak openly about Jesus of Nazareth in some strange town or whether to unfold some miracle or not. Other times they were less blazing decisions, and more subtle, like whether to try to speak more kindly or whether to change the way they treated women or outcasts. And sometimes they found themselves making decisions without even consciously *knowing* they were doing it—but decisions were coming out of their lives, and they were being slowly transformed by hanging around Jesus. They found themselves in the process of **deciding** for Christ. Deciding wasn't always easy. Sometimes others didn't like their decisions for Christ, or understand them. Sometimes their decisions placed them at significant risk. Sometimes they would decide, and then want to go back on their decision—they could waver... But they were being transformed, the more they decided to live like Jesus. And in deciding, more and more, they found themselves **growing**.

Today I wish to ask you: ARE YOU GROWING IN YOUR FAITH? This came to me—though it is such an obvious question for a pastor, but I have been distracted from this very central part of my job description for a bit... ARE YOU GROWING? I know, “well, are *YOU* growing, pastor?” Yes, I think I can still say that I am. For certain aspects of this thing we call Christianity my heart is becoming more tender. Slowly, my heart softens for people, and broadens in who I see needing Christ. Slowly, I want to invite Jesus into the dark, inner closets of my heart and see what He might do there. Slowly, I am trusting God with more and more though it is sometimes scary. I would rather walk by sight. But I think I see growth in my own heart, unless I am deluded. So, again, let me ask you: ARE YOU GROWING?

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, in reflection about his own growth. We tend to take a writing like the Letter to the Philippians and depersonalize it because we see it as *sacred* writing, and in so doing, almost to forget that it was a real letter from a real guy to a bunch of real people. And in that real letter, he wrote about how he viewed his own spiritual growth:

Philippians 3:12-14 (NASB95)

¹² Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

Philippians 3:12-14 (The Message)

¹² I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. ¹³ Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. ¹⁴ I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Paul had **followed**, then He **learned** and started to **make decisions**, and subsequently, he **grew**, in his walk with Christ. He was pressing on.

- ♦ He was releasing the past and looking forward.
- ♦ He had his eyes on the prize. He was a future-guy.
- ♦ I think there were probably some people who thought perhaps they HAD arrived in their relationship with God. Paul wasn't one of them.

Now the phrase I want you to get this morning is ***I press on***. There's a lot embedded in that little phrase. It means moving on from the past.

- ♦ You may have had some defeats in the past. Paul did too.
- ♦ You may have had some disappointments in your past. Paul did too.
- ♦ You may have had some sin in your past, even the very recent past. Paul did too.

We press on if we are growing. We have an attitude of ***reaching forward***. Now, at the risk of sounding like just a pitch-man, I DON'T WANT YOU TO THINK THAT I THINK REACHING FORWARD IS ALWAYS EASY. In fact, with some things in our past or present it is HARD to get yourself to the place where you're reaching forward.

But what I want to ask you to do, is to honestly assess yourself. IS YOUR FAITH GROWING NOW? (**Maybe that's ALL I want to accomplish today, is to get you to ask yourself that question.**)

- ♦ If so (and I can see clearly in a good number of you that it is), then praise God and keep reaching forward.
- ♦ If not, ask yourself, "**WHY NOT?**"

Now you understand that in the Christian life, you can't BLAME your own lack of growth on someone else. I don't know if I've ever said that very basic assumption so bluntly or not, but let me say it now. Your growth is your responsibility. Others may contribute to it, or they may distract you but ultimately you are the one whom God will ask, "Did you tend to your own growth in grace, regardless of whatever you were facing?"

The short point is, **all of us SHOULD be growing today**. All of us, at whatever point we are today in our walk of faith with Jesus Christ, SHOULD be moving forward. He has made awesome resources available to us. He has guaranteed success in whether we will make progress against sin. He has assured us that He will be right beside us even INSIDE us as we grow. But it is WE who must decide to grow, and to keep growing. Every one of us SHOULD be growing. There are none of us who get a pass; who get a sabbatical; who get an exemption.

But I want to encourage you today. You **CAN** grow. I think it is one of the devil's lies, when he says something like this: *"Sure Jesus rose, and maybe you think you've believed in that. But you are doomed to be stuck and stalled out. You will never make any significant progress or see any real change in your nature."* That's what he hisses at us...

But my friends, **RESIST the devil and he will flee from you**, James tells us...(James 4:6). You CAN grow, starting right here, at whatever point of growth you are, and with whatever challenges you face. That is the way real Christianity works. It picks up from where you are at. You can resume your growth against sin, against depression, against doubt and fear, against Satan, against addictions, against weariness and feeling defeated, against your upbringing and whatever dysfunctions that entails, against loneliness or just feeling ALONE, against, feeling purposeless and against danger. You can grow in your heart for Christ, in your seeing God, in your seeing Him use you in cool and exciting things. Today. No one here CANNOT grow. You can grow.

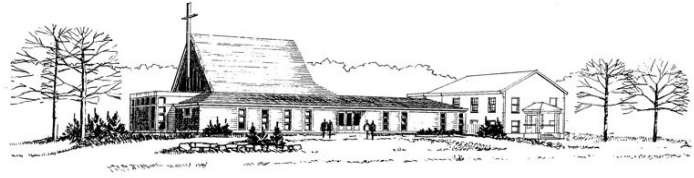
Third today, if you step out with Him, and seek Him you WILL grow. I like what the English Presbyterians wrote down in their little collection of beliefs in the mid 1640's... They scribbled this down:

They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.¹

If you *want* to grow, and if you *seek to grow*, you WILL grow.

- ♦ You will get CLOSER FEELING to Christ.
- ♦ You will HEAR HIS VOICE IN YOUR LIFE, a voice young people that I assure you is NEVER boring or droning.
- ♦ You will MAKE PROGRESS IN THE STUFF ABOUT YOU that you do not like.
- ♦ You will become WISER AND MORE DISCERNING and you will SEE more.
- ♦ You will sense His USING YOU and you will like that feeling.

¹ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XVII 1646.



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 13)

Scripture: Acts 1:1-8; 5:17-32

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 21st, 2007

Following by Witnessing

Acts 1:1-8 (NASB)

¹ THE first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. ³ To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of* forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴ And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” *He said*, “you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” ⁶ And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you shall receive **power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.**”

Acts 5:17-32

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy; ¹⁸ and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail. ¹⁹ But an angel of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, ²⁰ “Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.” ²¹ And upon hearing *this*, they entered into the temple about daybreak, **and began to teach**. Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent *orders* to the prison house for them to be brought. ²² But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned, and reported back, ²³ saying, “We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.” ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple *guard* and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. ²⁵ But someone came and reported to them, “Behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” ²⁶ Then the captain went along with the officers and *proceeded*

to bring them *back* without violence (for they were afraid of the people, lest they should be stoned).²⁷ And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them,²⁸ saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered and said, “**We must obey God rather than men.**”³⁰ “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.³¹ “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.³² “And **we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.**”

Introduction Imagine yourself having a conversation with someone you either know or even with a stranger, and asking them a question like this: “HAVE YOU COME TO THE PLACE IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE WHERE YOU CAN SAY FOR CERTAIN THAT IF YOU WERE TO DIE TONIGHT, YOU WOULD GO TO HEAVEN?” **Do you think that you could ever do such a thing?**

How likely is it for you to ask such a question of a friend, a family member or even a stranger?

WHY would you want to ask such a personal and serious question?

If you got the chance then, you might even ask a second question: “IF YOU WERE TO DIE TONIGHT, AND STAND BEFORE GOD, AND HE WERE TO ASK YOU, ‘WHY SHOULD I LET YOU INTO HEAVEN?’ WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?”

It is our suggestion to you this morning that a basic thing that a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ does, is to witness for Christ. The gospel is such a great thing, we cannot keep it to ourselves. HOW he or she share it, is a matter of great discussion. But not WHETHER he or she witnesses for Christ. It is what we read in Acts 1, as a commission from Jesus Himself to the apostles¹, and implied in Matthew 28:19,20¹, and what we see them doing throughout the Book of Acts and specifically in 5:30 and 31¹ where Peter puts it bluntly. Witnessing is the way God has chosen to get the news of eternal life and forgiveness of sin out to people.

- He could have chosen to just write it in the sky, *but He has not.*
- He could have chosen to send an angel directly to each person on the planet one time in everyone’s life and announce that salvation is in Christ by faith, *but He has not chosen that method.*
- He could have set up a system whereby people, in watching believers live good and charitable lives, make a mental connection with Jesus and automatically come to faith by observation, *but He has not.*

HE HAS CHOSEN VERBAL WITNESSING, by means of His disciples, in whatever time they live and in whatever place they live. Here is a definition of witnessing: “WITNESSING” IS TO TESTIFY VERBALLY, WITH WORDS, IN SPEECH, COMMUNICATING IT PERSONALLY AND DELIBERATELY TO UNSAVED PEOPLE, THAT JESUS CHRIST IS GOD’S SAVIOR FOR THE WORLD, REGARDLESS OF CONVENIENCE, POLITICAL

EXPEDIENCE, DANGER OR REPERCUSSIONS. He took our sins upon His body on the cross, died, and in so doing made atonement for all who will believe in it. He then rose from the dead, defeating death and Satan for all time, and even beyond time. We did not witness it *personally*, but we associate ourselves with those who did through our belief in their writings, the New Testament. We offer what they offer. We postulate what they postulated. We defend our ideas as they defended theirs. And so we ask people questions like those two “diagnostic” questions (as Evangelism Explosion called them.) Let’s say some things about what witnessing is NOT. Witnessing is NOT:

- Forcing people to listen, or trying to intimidate them or emotionally overpower them into belief in Christ.
- Belittling people’s objections or questions
- Insulting other people’s belief systems
- Manipulating or bargaining with people so that they will listen
- Impressing people with eloquence, slick presentations, skillful entertainment or melodrama

On the other hand, witnessing DOES involve:

- Passion – we are talking about the most urgent decision a person ever makes...
- Logic and rhetoric – there is nothing wrong with utilizing the wonderfully logical aspects of the gospel or to engage in well-crafted and respectful dialog.
- Persuasion – we say that arguing for the gospel generally goes wrong but using Spirit-led *persuasion* is perfectly appropriate. I believe God greatly uses our gentle and humble persuasiveness as encouragement and reinforcement for a person who otherwise may be tentative in their willingness to trust Christ and turn their lives over to Him.
- Honesty and Transparency – I think this is one of our greatest failings. Many Christians often seem to think that we need to present the picture somehow, that Christians have all the answers, are completely joyful and cheerful and that we have no ongoing battles. Many non-Christians can “smell a rat” when we do this and turn us off for inauthenticity BEFORE they even hear the message we bear!
- Clear ideas – when we present the gospel to someone, we should be clear. That means we are not UNCLEAR, confusing, or that we clutter the conversation up with too much detail, superfluous doctrines or personal preference.
- Personal testimony of involvement – it always impresses me about a salesman if HE uses the product he is selling. Using the story of your own experience with Christ is completely relevant and helpful if a) we don’t linger on too long; b) we avoid using our testimony to make the

conversation about US and c) we don't drown the listener in details that we just like to talk about.

- Statement of the consequences of rejecting the Gospel – Hell. That is the price for rejecting Christ. A person will pay for their own sins. Should we include this aspect? The temptation is to mute it, talk about it very quickly if we talk about it at all. But the final judgment is a reality and we must say what the Bible says about it.
- Invitation – I think this is an art more than it is a science, but there is nothing wrong about inviting a listener to invite Christ into his or her heart right then and there, when you are sharing the Gospel. We need to remember that there is no magic formula, no set “equation” of the right words strung together and no guarantee that just because a person utters a prayer, that this means a conversion has generally taken place. Time will tell and we can be assured that the person who has TRULY met Christ, will manifest that in time. In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul said that he was fully confident of the Gospel's power to change people. (Romans 1:16¹) This is our great confidence in witnessing. We can never predict WHO will come to Christ, of all the people that we try to witness to; but we CAN predict that SOME will respond to the power of the gospel. Sometimes the most unlike witness bears the most wonderful conversion! God has been please, Paul tells us, to use the ***foolish things of the world to confound the wise***. I love to hear stories of conversions to Christ from unlikely situations—that truly testifies that it is God who is at work in us and it is the ***Spirit “blows where He wishes and you do not know where He comes from or where He is going...”***

Paul gives a plainly logical sequence of thinking in Romans 10:12-15.¹ God responds to whoever calls on Him. How can a person call on a God that he hasn't believed in yet? How can he believe in a God that he hasn't heard about yet? How can he hear about this God if someone doesn't tell him? How can someone tell this fellow, if God hasn't sent him to talk to him? Strikingly logical!

THERE ARE CHALLENGES TO VERBAL WITNESSING I am not unaware of the challenges with witnessing.

- Witnessing is inherently a personal matter. It drives into the most private area of a person's life. There is an awkwardness to travel there with people—specifically with people you do not know well.
- Society does seem to become increasingly intolerant of Christians' witnessing the Gospel. Many around us do not realize or do not accept that we intend to bless people with good news. Some think our evangelism is our own kind of *jihad*. They think WE are intolerant and they call us all kinds of things for our desire to share Christ. This makes for a challenging

atmosphere in which to talk about Jesus Christ and I would not be surprised if we join the majority of other Christians from history in finding that we must witness with some risk and cost to the privilege in years to come. Our freedom to do so easily is really a small window in time.

- It *isn't always easy* to witness, so hard is it that many of us hardly do it at all. Witnessing may involve risk, and many of us are addicts to risk-abatement! But in this we are in good company: see 1 Corinthians 16:9.¹
- And witnessing includes no guarantees that it will succeed at all, in any specific instance.
- It also seems clear that there is no one, single method to witness.
- In fact many Christians are not sure HOW to witness; what to say, what to include about the Gospel and what to exclude. Pentecostals have even coined the term “full Gospel,” implying that the rest of us have only a partial gospel.

There are indeed difficulties with the subject of witnessing. Nonetheless, Jesus told us to make disciples. He indicated that with power from the Holy Spirit, we WOULD testify to Him and to the Gospel.

On the positive side, in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul said that he was fully confident of the Gospel's power to change people. (Romans 1:16¹) Paul himself was a dramatic example of someone quite unlikely to start believing in Jesus Christ but found himself overwhelmed with Christ. Later in that same letter Paul gives a **plainly logical sequence** of thinking in Romans 10:12-15.¹

- ◆ God responds to whoever calls on Him.
- ◆ How can a person call on a God that he hasn't believed in yet?
- ◆ How can he believe in a God that he hasn't heard about yet?
- ◆ How can he hear about this God if someone doesn't tell him?
- ◆ How can someone tell this fellow, if God hasn't sent him to talk to him? Strikingly logical!

A GOOD DISCIPLE ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGES AND FOCUSES ON THE URGENCY

Part of following Jesus is to be willing and even anxious to tell other people about Him. The challenges are real but so is the urgency that people hear and understand exactly what it is we are saying in the gospel. If what we say is true then there is nothing of higher importance and there is not greater opportunity in life for people, for all people than to hear about the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ.

A GOOD DISCIPLE LEARNS HOW TO WITNESS AND SEEKS OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE THE STAKES ARE HIGH

If we want to be growing in our Christian faith, I am convinced that witnessing is a thing we will explore. You may never have shared the gospel with anyone yet—but you can. The stakes are high. And I am also convinced that the Christian who wants to witness for Christ will find people that the Lord places in his or her path with whom to share about Him. There are as many opportunities to share Christ as you are open to. This is one of the supernatural areas of faith in the Christian life that I believe the Lord is delighted to meet our faith. He will provide people with whom to talk about the Savior.

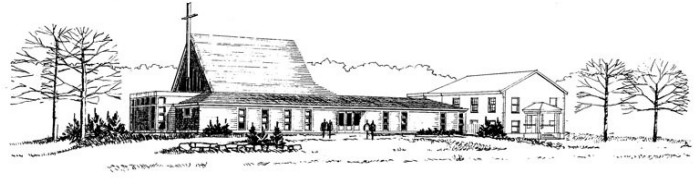
Basic Questions on Whether You and I Will Witness for Christ:

Now, there are FIVE questions for you to ask yourself. These are:

1. Do I know the Gospel? It isn't complicated or philosophically difficult to understand. All people are sinners. They are born that way and they refine it with time. They need a Savior because God is holy. Jesus came to be the Savior and He died an atoning death for sinners and He rose to defeat death. He offers new life without cost for the believing.
2. Can I get to the basic point quickly? (as did the apostles in Acts 5:30)
3. Am I alert to opportunities? It takes a little praying and a little watching!
4. Is this a one-time chance, or relationship witnessing? Both are appropriate. God will provide both and He will bless both.
5. Do you think it would become easier, if you saw some people come to Christ under your ministry? I don't mean to make this a kind of magical formula. Some people have led many people to Christ at some point in their lives and then as time goes on, find it harder for whatever reason. But once you have seen someone come to faith on the power of the word of God's testimony, and by means of your witness to it, it is exciting and it builds great confidence.

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I think the Lord wants us to be confidence witnesses. I think He wants to use us, and if YOU will make it your task to learn how to share the faith, to pray, asking God to use you and to bring people into your life with whom you can share the good news, I have no doubt that He will use you. You will see people come to faith because the Spirit of God is in the business of bringing people to faith and many times with the help of another person. God bless you and us as a church as we seek to carry out the Great Commission.



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 14)

Scripture:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 4th, 2007

Following by Witnessing (Part 2)

1 Corinthians 16:9 (NASB)

⁹ for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Romans 10:12-15 (NASB)

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; ¹³ for “WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!”

Introduction What do you think the hardest thing to do, in the Christian life, would be? At least for you? You know, as a disciple of Jesus you’re supposed to be doing some things. Right? So, is reading your Bible the hardest thing for you? Is believing God, in faith? Is getting to know some people and exploring whatever this word “community” might mean? Is it repentance or asking forgiveness? Is it learning to THINK about your faith, and developing your theology? I know this is really a rhetorical question because there’s not really just one answer. What is the hardest thing for a Christian to do, depends on the Christian, and at what stage they are in their growth, and other factors too. But for you, what is most difficult? Twenty years ago, if you had asked me this, I probably would have said, “prayer.” And I would have had all these reasons for saying that prayer was the most difficult. Now, it is something different, I think, for me. Now, for me, I think it is witnessing.

-
- It isn't because I am less confident in the power of the Gospel. I love Paul's words to the Romans, ***I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom.1:16).***
 - It isn't because I think the world has figured us out, and that I am intimidated by non-Christians or that I think they might win any dialogue I might enter into with them about spiritual things. It isn't that we listen to the objections of people to the Gospel message, and we go, "Hmm, maybe they're right."
 - It isn't because I am tired of witnessing.
 - It isn't even because we cannot control who responds and who doesn't and that it almost seems random as to who will respond to the news of redemption...

I'm not sure why it is, but for me, it is. I want to talk today about some of the CHALLENGES of witnessing. We know we are *supposed* to testify for Christ. We try to invite people to consider the claims of Christ. We're pretty sure we know what witnessing is NOT—this really unnatural thing that feels more to the non-Christian like assault than being given the "bread of life." And so many of us shy away from calculated, formulaic ways of witnessing—this is part of what the "emerging" church is talking about—the Gospel is more than just imparting information. It involves backing up our words with mercy, help, advocacy and meeting real needs. We heard Henry Cloud yesterday at Congress 2007 talk about this some. And we know that part of what it is, is to simply ASK people to consider what faith in Christ might mean for them, based on what the Bible promises. Invitation is an art more than it is a science, but there is nothing wrong about inviting a listener to invite Christ into his or her heart right then and there, when you are sharing the Gospel. We need to remember that there is no magic formula, no set "equation" of the right words strung together and no guarantee that just because a person utters a prayer, that this means a conversion has generally taken place. Time will tell and we can be assured that the person who has TRULY met Christ, will manifest that in time. In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul said that he was fully confident of the Gospel's power to change people. (**Romans 1:16**¹) We can be encouraged because the GOSPEL ITSELF IS POWERFUL. This is our great confidence in witnessing. We can never predict WHO will come to Christ, of all the people that we try to witness to; but we CAN predict that SOME will respond to the power of the gospel. Sometimes the most unlikely witness bears the most wonderful conversion! God has been pleased, Paul tells us, to use the ***foolish things of the world to confound the wise.*** I love to hear stories of conversions to Christ from unlikely situations—that truly testifies that it is God who is at work in us

and it is the ***Spirit “blows where He wishes and you do not know where He comes from or where He is going...”***

Later in that same letter Paul gives a **plainly logical sequence** of thinking in Romans 10:12-15.¹

- ♦ God responds to whoever calls on Him.
- ♦ How can a person call on a God that he hasn't believed in yet?
- ♦ How can he believe in a God that he hasn't heard about yet?
- ♦ How can he hear about this God if someone doesn't tell him?

Strikingly logical! And YET, there are still quite a few challenges to witnessing, and many of us feel like there's a HOLD on witnessing in our own lives. Yes, I know, some of you have no problem passing out tracts randomly, and laying one Gospel presentation or another on someone. But there are challenges before us when we get to this part of following Jesus...

CHALLENGES TO VERBAL WITNESSING We can summarize some of the challenges with witnessing.

- Witnessing is **INHERENTLY A PERSONAL MATTER**. It drives into the most private area of a person's life. There is an awkwardness to travel there with people—specifically with people you do not know well.
- **WESTERN SOCIETY DOES SEEM TO BECOME INCREASINGLY INTOLERANT** of Christians' witnessing the Gospel. (I hear stories of how this is **NOT** so true in Africa, South America or Korea.) Many around us do not realize or do not accept that we intend to bless people with good news. Some think our evangelism is our own kind of *jihad*. They think **WE** are intolerant and they call us all kinds of things for our desire to share Christ. This makes for a challenging atmosphere in which to talk about Jesus Christ and I would not be surprised if we join the majority of other Christians from history in finding that we must witness with some risk and cost to the privilege in years to come. Our freedom to do so easily is really a small window in time.
- **IT ISN'T ALWAYS EASY TO WITNESS**, so hard is it that many of us hardly do it at all. Witnessing may involve risk, and many of us are addicts to risk-abatement! But in this we are in good company: see 1 Corinthians 16:9.¹
- And witnessing includes **NO GUARANTEES** that it will succeed at all, in any specific instance.
- For many situations—**PROFESSIONALLY, RELATIONALLY, IT SEEMS LIKE IT WOULD BE VERY AWKWARD** to try to bring up spiritual things. A college professor can't easily ask his or her class or his or her colleagues, "Have you considered Jesus?" A doctor doesn't want to speak about spiritual things to a patient or to a staff member. A fellow bowling team member doesn't feel like they want to jeopardize the camaraderie of the

team by venturing over into something so personal as another team member's spiritual life...

- It also seems clear that there is NO ONE, SINGLE METHOD to witness.
- In fact many Christians are NOT SURE HOW to witness; what to say, what to include about the Gospel and what to exclude. Pentecostals have even coined the term "full Gospel," implying that the rest of us have only a partial gospel.
- SATAN opposes the spread of the news about Jesus Christ. I think he does this in subtle as well as blatant ways. I'm not sure why he thinks he can succeed since the

There are indeed difficulties with the subject of witnessing. Nonetheless, Jesus told us to **make disciples**. He indicated that with power from the Holy Spirit, the **apostles WOULD testify** to Him and to the Gospel, and we take that prediction to extend beyond the original twelve!

A GOOD DISCIPLE ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGES AND FOCUSES ON THE URGENCY

Part of following Jesus is to be willing and even anxious to tell other people about Him. The challenges are real but so is the urgency that people hear and understand exactly what it is we are saying in the gospel. If what we say is true then there is nothing of higher importance and there is not greater opportunity in life for people, for all people than to hear about the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ.

A GOOD DISCIPLE LEARNS HOW TO WITNESS AND SEEKS OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE THE STAKES ARE HIGH

If we want to be growing in our Christian faith, I am convinced that witnessing is a thing we will explore. You may never have shared the gospel with anyone yet—but you can. The stakes are high. And I am also convinced that the Christian who wants to witness for Christ will find people that the Lord places in his or her path with whom to share about Him. There are as many opportunities to share Christ as you are open to. This is one of the supernatural areas of faith in the Christian life that I believe the Lord is delighted to meet our faith. He will provide people with whom to talk about the Savior. Adapted from *How Can I Break the Silence?* By Radio Bible Class Ministries www.discoveryseries.org/q0502

Basic Questions on Whether You and I Will Witness for Christ:

Now, there are FIVE questions for you to ask yourself. These are:

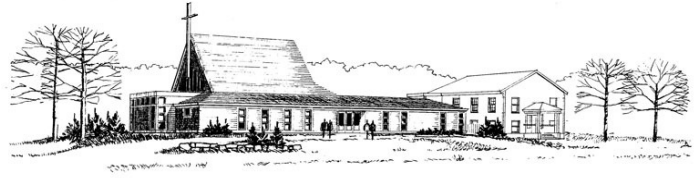
1. Do I know the Gospel? It isn't complicated or philosophically difficult to understand. All people are sinners. They are born that way and they refine it with time. They need a Savior because God is holy. Jesus came to be

the Savior and He died an atoning death for sinners and He rose to defeat death. He offers new life without cost for the believing. Here are four ways to share the Gospel¹:

- a. **The Roman Road:** Romans 3:23 relates MAN'S NEED and says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 relates SIN'S PENALTY and says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 5:8 relates GOD'S PROVISION, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." And finally, Romans 10:9,10 relates MAN'S RESPONSE: "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."
 - b. **THE ABC's of Salvation:**
 - i. **Admit** that you are a sinner (quote Romans 3:23, above).
 - ii. **Believe** on Christ, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)
 - iii. **Confess** your faith (quote Romans 10:9,10, above).
 - c. **Four Good Things God Wants You to Know**
 - i. Your need as God sees it (Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9; John 3:3; Romans 3:10,11,23, etc.)
 - ii. Your own helplessness (Proverbs 14:12; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Galatians 2:16; James 2:10)
 - iii. God's provision for your need (Isaiah 53:6; John 3:16; 2 Cor.5:21; 1st Peter 3:18)
 - iv. God's promise to meet your need (John 10:28; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 7:25; Jude 24). Put your trust in Jesus Christ. Make your decision today!
 - d. **The Bridge to Eternal Life** – Because all of us have sinned (Rom.3:23) we are not only destined to die physically (Rom.6:23), but we are *presently* in a state of spiritual death or separation from God (Ephesians 2:1-4). When Jesus died on the cross, He took our condemnation and paid the price for our sins (Rom.4:25; 5:8; 1st Cor.15:3). By suffering and dying as our substitute, Jesus (1) provided a righteousness that God can credit to our account (2 Cor.5:21) and (2) made reconciliation possible between sinners and a holy God (1st John 2:1,2).
2. Can I get to the basic point quickly? (as did the apostles in Acts 5:30)
 3. Am I alert to opportunities? It takes a little praying and a little watching!
 4. Is this a one-time chance, or relationship witnessing? Both are appropriate. God will provide both and He will bless both.

5. Do you think it would become easier, if you saw some people come to Christ under your ministry? I don't mean to make this a kind of magical formula. Some people have led many people to Christ at some point in their lives and then as time goes on, find it harder for whatever reason. But once you have seen someone come to faith on the power of the word of God's testimony, and by means of your witness to it, it is exciting and it builds great confidence.

I think the Lord wants us to be confidence witnesses. I think He wants to use us, and if YOU will make it your task to learn how to share the faith, to pray, asking God to use you and to bring people into your life with whom you can share the good news, I have no doubt that He will use you. You will see people come to faith because the Spirit of God is in the business of bringing people to faith and many times with the help of another person. God bless you and us as a church as we seek to carry out the Great Commission.



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 15)

Scripture:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 11th, 2007

Following by Witnessing (Part 3) **WHAT THEY NEED TO HEAR and WHY**

Acts 10:34-43 (NASB)

And opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him. ³⁶ “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)— ³⁷ you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. ³⁸ “*You know of Jesus of Nazareth*, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him. ³⁹ “And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. ⁴⁰ “God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴² “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Introduction Jim, Tony, Jeff, Herb, Phil, Abbi, Michelle. John, Brian. Some names of people that I know, some for years, for are not Christians. These are people that given the chance, I could tell them how to have their sins forgiven, how to become a child of God, how to know they can go to heaven when they die.

Some of these people go to one kind of church or another... Some of them probably understand the doctrine of the resurrection. But I can tell they do not yet understand the Gospel. Witnessing is a hard thing for me, for some reason. I suspect it is hard for many of us. And yet, we have the Gospel. We have the plan of salvation. We understand that salvation is by free grace. But we hesitate, for years.

We have said that plainly Jesus told His disciples that they WOULD be witnesses for Him in an increasing way. We have said that Jesus TOLD His disciples to make disciples, also in an ever-increasing our spreading-out way. We have suggested that

witnessing is to testify verbally to certain ideas, with words, in speech, along with loving actions & mercy, communicating personally and deliberately, to unsaved people, that Jesus Christ is God's Savior and the ONLY Savior for the world regardless of inconvenience, political expedience, danger, repercussions or cost to the witnesses.

We have spent a little time talking about

- what we believe witnessing is NOT, and also
- what some of the challenges to witnessing are which frustrate some of us. There are indeed difficulties with the subject of witnessing and I believe one of the first steps to dealing with that is to honestly admit that it is true. But the main point we need to get at, is that **A GOOD DISCIPLE ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGES AND FOCUSES ON THE URGENCY.**

Part of following Jesus is to be willing and even anxious to tell other people about Him. The Steve Green song (1987 I think), *People need the Lord* expresses the situation. It goes,

Everyday they pass me by, I can see it in their eye. Empty people filled with care, headed who knows where?

On they go through private pain, Living fear to fear. Laughter hides their silent cries, only Jesus hears.

People need the Lord, people need the Lord at the end of broken dreams, He's the open door. People need the Lord, people need the Lord. When will we realize -- people need the Lord?

We are called to take His light to a world where wrong seems right. What would be too great a cost, For sharing Life with one who's lost?

Through His love our hearts can feel all the grief they bear. They must hear the Words of Life only we can share.

People need the Lord, people need the Lord at the end of broken dreams, He's the open door. People need the Lord, people need the Lord. When will we realize that we must give our lives, For people need the Lord. People need the Lord.

The challenges are real but SO IS THE URGENCY that people hear and understand exactly what it is we are saying in the gospel. If what we say is true then there is nothing of higher importance and there is not greater opportunity in life for people, for all people than to hear about the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ.

A GOOD DISCIPLE LEARNS HOW TO WITNESS AND SEEKS OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE THE STAKES ARE HIGH

If we want to be growing in our Christian faith, I am convinced that witnessing is a thing we will explore. You may never have shared the gospel with anyone yet—but you can. **I AM ALSO CONVINCED THAT THE CHRISTIAN WHO WANTS TO WITNESS FOR CHRIST WILL FIND PEOPLE THAT THE LORD PLACES IN HIS OR HER PATH WITH WHOM TO SHARE ABOUT HIM.** There are *as many* opportunities to share Christ *as you are open to*. This is one of the supernatural areas of faith in the Christian life that I believe the Lord is delighted to meet our faith. **HE WILL PROVIDE PEOPLE WITH WHOM TO TALK ABOUT THE SAVIOR.**

Basic Questions on Whether You and I Will Witness for Christ:

Now, here are FIVE questions for you to ask yourself. These are:

6. DO I KNOW THE GOSPEL? Can I explain the plan of salvation to someone, I got the opportunity? It isn't complicated or philosophically difficult to understand. All people are sinners. They are born that way and they refine it with time. They need a Savior because God is holy. Jesus came to be the Savior and He died an atoning death for sinners and He rose to defeat death. He offers new life without cost for the believing. Here are just five of popular ways I have heard to share the Gospel¹:
 - a. **The Roman Road:** Romans 3:23 relates MAN'S NEED and says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 relates SIN'S PENALTY and says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 5:8 relates GOD'S PROVISION, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." And finally, Romans 10:9,10 relates MAN'S RESPONSE: "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart

one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

b. **THE ABC's of Salvation:**

- i. **A**dmit that you are a sinner (quote Romans 3:23, above).
- ii. **B**elieve on Christ, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)
- iii. **C**onfess your faith (quote Romans 10:9,10, above).

c. **Four Good Things God Wants You to Know**

- i. Your need as God sees it (Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9; John 3:3; Romans 3:10,11,23, etc.)
- ii. Your own helplessness (Proverbs 14:12; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Galatians 2:16; James 2:10)
- iii. God’s provision for your need (Isaiah 53:6; John 3:16; 2 Cor.5:21; 1st Peter 3:18)
- iv. God’s promise to meet your need (John 10:28; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 7:25; Jude 24). Put your trust in Jesus Christ. Make your decision today!

d. **The Four Spiritual Laws**

- i. God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life. (John 3:16; 10:10)
- ii. Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore he cannot know and experience God’s plan for his life. (Rom. 3:23; 6:23)
- iii. Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s plan for your life. (Romans 5:8; I Cor. 15:3-6; John 14:6)
- iv. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives. (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8.9; John 3:1-8).

e. **The Bridge to Eternal Life** – Because all of us have sinned (Rom.3:23) we are not only destined to die physically (Rom.6:23), but we are *presently* in a state of spiritual death or separation from God (Ephesians 2:1-4). When Jesus died on the cross, He took our condemnation and paid the price for our sins (Rom.4:25; 5:8; 1st Cor.15:3). By suffering and dying as our substitute, Jesus (1) provided a righteousness that God can credit to our account (2 Cor.5:21) and (2) made reconciliation possible between sinners and a holy God (1st John 2:1,2).

7. CAN I GET TO THE BASIC POINT QUICKLY? (as did the apostles in Acts 5:30)

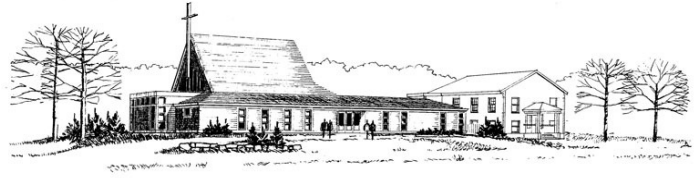
8. AM I ALERT TO OPPORTUNITIES? It takes a little praying and a little watching!

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9. IS THIS A ONE-TIME CHANCE, OR RELATIONSHIP WITNESSING? Both are appropriate. God will provide both and He will bless both.
10. WILL YOU BE OVERCOME WITH PRAISE WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE COME TO CHRIST YOUR MINISTRY? I don't mean to make this a kind of magical formula. Some people have led many people to Christ at some point in their lives and then as time goes on, find it harder for whatever reason. But once you have seen someone come to faith on the power of the word of God's testimony, and by means of your witness to it, it is exciting and it builds great confidence. And it is almost certainly results in a flood of praise from you, to God, for His grace and power. It is HE who converts people to Christ, not us.

I think the Lord wants us to be confidence witnesses. I think He wants to use us, and if YOU will make it your task to learn how to share the faith, to pray, asking God to use you and to bring people into your life with whom you can share the good news, I have no doubt that He will use you. You will see people come to faith because the Spirit of God is in the business of bringing people to faith and many times with the help of another person. God bless you and us as a church as we seek to carry out the Great Commission.

I notice, only recently, that some Christians are just so in love with the Gospel that it is on their minds all the time. They love to talk about the Gospel, hear it spoken of, sung about, acted out. Some believers are just so in love with the grace of God that it is their greatest passion. The Gospel... The good news of Jesus Christ. These people think that's the greatest thing there is, I have noticed. They can't get enough Gospel talk. It never gets old. It never gets old hat. It never gets boring. It is always new. And they are always, it seems, being made new, over and over and over again, by that Gospel.

Next week we will plan to say something about giving your testimony and how that fits in to witnessing.



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 16)

Scripture: Galatians 1:11-24

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 18th, 2007

Following by Witnessing (Part 4) **HOW TO GIVE YOUR TESTIMONY**

Galatians 1:11-24 (NASB)

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴ and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵ But when He who had set me apart, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; ²³ but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they were glorifying God because of me.

Introduction Whenever I hear a Christian tell their story, I am always anxious to get to the good part—the part where they find Christ. The part where they tell us that they discovered faith in their hearts—saving faith—in the Lord Jesus Christ. We may hear all kinds of other details, about parents and children or spouses or bosses. We may hear about the depths of debauchery and the slime-pits of sin (as a pastor of mine when I was a young man used to talk about). The testimonies may be long and dramatic, or funny or even too self-focused. But

I love the part when we get down to it—where they tell us what happened when they embraced the Lord Jesus by faith for the first time. I like hearing first-hand how someone was saved; how they crossed over from being among the living-dead to becoming a child of God. I love that part!

I really wish that everyone here would be able and willing to give at least a salvation testimony. Let me just let you know up front that this is my agenda.

Discipleship, So Far... We have been thinking about what it means today to follow Jesus Christ. We started this series by considering some of the benefits of following Christ. We said following Christ is done primarily by trusting in Him and by developing a growing faith in His providence, provision and protection. Then we said that discipleship—the word for following Christ—is best done together, corporately, in community, in fellowship with other followers and that this is actually God’s *design* for people who want to follow Christ; that they should do it together. Discipleship is fundamentally a corporate experience. We said that following Christ will entail a basic friendliness to newcomers and that we cannot get away from this since it is the heart of He whom we are trying to follow. We said also that following Jesus will involve developing a life of prayer and a habit of listening to God, through reading His Word. After considering some “case studies” of following Jesus (Joseph, Mary, the magi), we said that when any person NOW who wants to follow Jesus, they *should* work on growth, they *can* grow and by His help they WILL grow in their love for Him. And now, for the past three messages, we have suggested that those who follow Jesus will desire to invite OTHERS to follow Him as well. This is perhaps the most nervous aspect of Christian discipleship but it is basic to learning how to really follow Jesus Christ. Here’s a short testimony given by a man who was named Gordon Gustafson¹, a career missionary who went home to be with the Lord a couple of years ago... Gordon was a sailor on the USS Tennessee, giving an early morning Sunday Bible study on Dec. 7th, 1941, moored right next to the USS Arizona...

Convinced that there is a God, and that he has spoken through the Bible, I realized that what He had to say was of utmost importance! Then I met victorious strong Christians in the Navy who had God’s Word on their hearts and on the tip of their tongue. I wanted to lead men to Christ like they did by having a “thus saith the Lord,” and so at age nineteen I started to memorize Scripture as they did. It took a little discipline to memorize a verse or two a week and to review them for seven weeks, but soon I had an “arsenal” of God’s Word, which is “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword,” to give me victory over temptation, strengthen my faith and lead others to faith in Christ as their Savior.

If we need bolstering about speaking up for Christ in challenging or politically “electrical” places, we need go no further than reading about the apostle Paul—no stranger to sticking his neck out to win a chance to talk about Christ. IN

GALATIANS 1 WE HAVE SOME OF HIS OWN PERSONAL TESTIMONY...in written form. This testimony was written to Christians, not non-Christians, and it is a testimony meant not to win people to Christ but to validate Paul's office in the early church. Nevertheless, it is a good example of a testimony. Paul gave other testimonies, as did other early Christians in the New Testament. In this testimony, we can notice some helpful principles:

First, Paul did not invent his gospel. It was revealed to him. You are I, hopefully, can say the same thing. People will speculate many reasons as to why you are a follower of Jesus Christ—your parents were, you can't come up with anything better, you are dependent on religion, and so forth. But we did not invent this faith in Christ. It was given to us. It was revealed to us.

Second, Paul then tells some of how God had worked in his life, although he doesn't detail the road to Damascus experience here—he does in Luke's record in Acts. Paul “worked out his early Christian life largely by Himself, or rather, between himself and God. How has He worked in yours? If you cannot identify any work of God in your life—circumstances, feeling a need for a Savior, a time when you really surrendered to Him, maybe you have not yet really met Him. If you have, then how did He work in your life? Paul could identify a number of ways God led Him, spoke to Him, changed His desires and direction.

Third, Paul had a very dramatic and carnal former manner of life. It was religious enough, and very zealous, but he had plainly seen that it was misguided. It had no life, just zeal for a code. And that zeal for the Law led him to become a firebrand persecutor of anyone—specifically “Jesus-followers”—who didn't go along with the Law.

Fourth, in verse 24, he says that **God got the glory** for how Paul's life had changed. I think this makes this testimony even MORE authentic and genuine. Paul's radical turn-around resulted in people praising God! There could be no other explanation, so complete was Paul's change. A good testimony causes the hearers (or readers) to praise the Lord and honor Him.

Fifth, Paul's testimony to the Galatians featured a theme (vs. 23). Paul even quotes his reputation: HE WHO ONCE PERSECUTED US IS NOW PREACHING THE FAITH WHICH HE ONCE TRIED TO DESTROY. What is the theme of your life? How has God worked out His amazing grace in your situation? Can you encapsulate it in a theme? Yes, this will require some thought. I would encourage you to pray and sit down and write out some ideas...

Now let me share with you some ideas today about FOUR basic questions concerning giving a testimony. I would love for you to put together a thoughtful testimony and plan to share it with us!

WHY?

1. Because God is honored and He gets the credit.
2. Others need to hear it. You would be amazed at how your testimony can be used of the Lord in others' lives. You may not think so. But I believe this is a way the Spirit really likes to move. Do not short-change us by withholding a testimony. And, non-Christians need to hear that faith really happens in normal people! God can use your testimony tremendously in the life of a non-Christian. Why would you want to get in the way of that?
3. It is plainly illustrated in the New Testament.
4. It brings joy and renewed courage and determination to others.

WHAT?

1. Brief circumstances concerning the time of your conversion. It is important to focus here, and don't make your hearer listen to too much. Giving a testimony is not a therapy time for you. It is to bless the hearer. Some detail is important, but not too much.
2. Choose what kind of testimony for the occasion. Paul's defended his ministry as an apostle. Gordon's tells of how he learned to value Scripture memory. There are many kinds of testimonies: how you came to Christ, how God has answered prayer, how He has used you, etc.
3. Choose a relevant Scripture verse to share. One verse or at most two can be a great thing to share. But there is little value in just spouting off Bible verses in non-Christians' faces. The Word of God is not magical. It needs to be heard by open hearts.
4. How were you changed by God's grace? Change is what people are most interested in. Real change. Tell us how the Lord has changed or IS changing you. That testifies to God's power and goodness and love.

HOW?

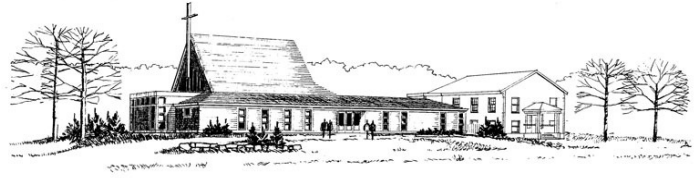
1. Eagerly. We should all be eager to speak out about God's goodness and grace. It is something for us, as a body, to pray about—and to not quit until we are a body quick to stand and give testimony to the Lord's wonderful presence in our lives and not resting until we are that way.
2. God-focused. He should be the focus. We should be the backdrop.
3. Keep it short. Five minutes is a good general length.

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4. What *you* like to hear. Treat people the way you like to be treated. I suspect that you do NOT like to be talked down to, condescended to, talked to for too long a period of time or intimidated. Don't do that to others.
 5. Just tell what happened. Here's the thing to remember—just report in your testimony what happened to you. Don't worry about what you think SHOULD have happened, what happened to your sister, or what you *really* want to preach to the listener. Just testify honestly and clearly what actually DID happen for you.
 6. Creatively:
 - a. Personal, face-to-face
 - b. E-mail
 - c. Instant Messaging
 - d. Blogging or newsletters
 - e. Written or lyrical (a song)
 - f. Video

WHEN?

1. Whenever there is opportunity. This means being alert and open and prayerful for chances to tell your story.
2. When you have a good moment with a non-Christian. Perhaps this is a time that you have WON by friendship and sincere interest IN the listener. They may even ask you for your story, or for guidance after you have demonstrated good friendship.
3. At times of fellowship when testimonies are invited. Among us, there are plenty of chances to testify and build us up with confidence. Believe me, we need your testimony and we need many of them.

We get much joy from hearing personally how God has worked. It really ministers to us and I believe we are sitting on a motherlode of wealth of testimony about how God has worked in our lives. Let's work at this. Let's witness for Christ by working up our own testimonies and looking for ways to share them!



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The testimonies may be long and dramatic, or funny or even too self-focused. But I love the part when we get down to it—where they tell us what happened when they embraced the Lord Jesus by faith for the first time. I like hearing first-hand how someone was saved; how they crossed over from being among the living-dead to becoming a child of God. I love that part!

I really wish that everyone here would be able and willing to give at least a salvation testimony. Let me just let you know up front that this is my agenda.

Discipleship, So Far... We have been thinking about what it means today to follow Jesus Christ. We started this series by considering some of the benefits of following Christ. We said following Christ is done primarily by trusting in Him and by developing a growing faith in His providence, provision and protection. Then we said that discipleship—the word for following Christ—is best done together, corporately, in community, in fellowship with other followers and that this is actually God’s *design* for people who want to follow Christ; that they should do it together. Discipleship is fundamentally a corporate experience. We said that following Christ will entail a basic friendliness to newcomers and that we cannot get away from this since it is the heart of He whom we are trying to follow. We said also that following Jesus will involve developing a life of prayer and a habit of listening to God, through reading His Word. After considering some “case studies” of following Jesus (Joseph, Mary, the magi), we said that when any person NOW who wants to follow Jesus, they *should* work on growth, they *can* grow and by His help they WILL grow in their love for Him. And now, for the past three messages, we have suggested that those who follow Jesus will desire to invite OTHERS to follow Him as well. This is perhaps the most nervous aspect of Christian discipleship but it is basic to learning how to really follow Jesus Christ. Here’s a short testimony given by a man who was named Gordon Gustafson¹, a career missionary who went home to be with the Lord a couple of years ago... Gordon was a sailor on the USS Tennessee, giving an early morning Sunday Bible study on Dec. 7th, 1941, moored right next to the USS Arizona...

Convinced that there is a God, and that he has spoken through the Bible, I realized that what He had to say was of utmost importance! Then I met victorious strong Christians in the Navy who had God’s Word on their hearts and on the tip of their tongue. I wanted to lead men to Christ like they did by having a “thus saith the Lord,” and so at age nineteen I started to memorize Scripture as they did. It took a little discipline to memorize a verse or two a week and to review them for seven weeks, but soon I had an “arsenal” of God’s Word, which is “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword,” to give me victory over temptation, strengthen my faith and lead others to faith in Christ as their Savior.

If we need bolstering about speaking up for Christ in challenging or politically “electrical” places, we need go no further than reading about the apostle Paul—

no stranger to sticking his neck out to win a chance to talk about Christ. IN GALATIANS 1 WE HAVE SOME OF HIS OWN PERSONAL TESTIMONY...in written form. This testimony was written to Christians, not non-Christians, and it is a testimony meant not to win people to Christ but to validate Paul's office in the early church. Nevertheless, it is a good example of a testimony. Paul gave other testimonies, as did other early Christians in the New Testament. In this testimony, we can notice some helpful principles:

First, Paul did not invent his gospel. It was revealed to him. You are I, hopefully, can say the same thing. People will speculate many reasons as to why you are a follower of Jesus Christ—your parents were, you can't come up with anything better, you are dependent on religion, and so forth. But we did not invent this faith in Christ. It was given to us. It was revealed to us.

Second, Paul then tells some of how God had worked in his life, although he doesn't detail the road to Damascus experience here—he does in Luke's record in Acts. Paul “worked out his early Christian life largely by Himself, or rather, between himself and God. How has He worked in yours? If you cannot identify any work of God in your life—circumstances, feeling a need for a Savior, a time when you really surrendered to Him, maybe you have not yet really met Him. If you have, then how did He work in your life? Paul could identify a number of ways God led Him, spoke to Him, changed His desires and direction.

Third, Paul had a very dramatic and carnal former manner of life. It was religious enough, and very zealous, but he had plainly seen that it was misguided. It had no life, just zeal for a code. And that zeal for the Law led him to become a firebrand persecutor of anyone—specifically “Jesus-followers”—who didn't go along with the Law.

Fourth, in verse 24, he says that **God got the glory** for how Paul's life had changed. I think this makes this testimony even MORE authentic and genuine. Paul's radical turn-around resulted in people praising God! There could be no other explanation, so complete was Paul's change. A good testimony causes the hearers (or readers) to praise the Lord and honor Him.

Fifth, Paul's testimony to the Galatians featured a theme (vs. 23). Paul even quotes his reputation: HE WHO ONCE PERSECUTED US IS NOW PREACHING THE FAITH WHICH HE ONCE TRIED TO DESTROY. What is the theme of your life? How has God worked out His amazing grace in your situation? Can you encapsulate it in a theme? Yes, this will require some thought. I would encourage you to pray and sit down and write out some ideas...

Now let me share with you some ideas today about FOUR basic questions concerning giving a testimony. I would love for you to put together a thoughtful testimony and plan to share it with us!

WHY?

5. Because God is honored and He gets the credit.
6. Others need to hear it. You would be amazed at how your testimony can be used of the Lord in others' lives. You may not think so. But I believe this is a way the Spirit really likes to move. Do not short-change us by withholding a testimony. And, non-Christians need to hear that faith really happens in normal people! God can use your testimony tremendously in the life of a non-Christian. Why would you want to get in the way of that?
7. It is plainly illustrated in the New Testament.
8. It brings joy and renewed courage and determination to others.

WHAT?

5. Brief circumstances concerning the time of your conversion. It is important to focus here, and don't make your hearer listen to too much. Giving a testimony is not a therapy time for you. It is to bless the hearer. Some detail is important, but not too much.
6. Choose what kind of testimony for the occasion. Paul's defended his ministry as an apostle. Gordon's tells of how he learned to value Scripture memory. There are many kinds of testimonies: how you came to Christ, how God has answered prayer, how He has used you, etc.
7. Choose a relevant Scripture verse to share. One verse or at most two can be a great thing to share. But there is little value in just spouting off Bible verses in non-Christians' faces. The Word of God is not magical. It needs to be heard by open hearts.
8. How were you changed by God's grace? Change is what people are most interested in. Real change. Tell us how the Lord has changed or IS changing you. That testifies to God's power and goodness and love.

HOW?

7. Eagerly. We should all be eager to speak out about God's goodness and grace. It is something for us, as a body, to pray about—and to not quit until we are a body quick to stand and give testimony to the Lord's wonderful presence in our lives and not resting until we are that way.
8. God-focused. He should be the focus. We should be the backdrop.
9. Keep it short. Five minutes is a good general length.

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10. What *you* like to hear. Treat people the way you like to be treated. I suspect that you do NOT like to be talked down to, condescended to, talked to for too long a period of time or intimidated. Don't do that to others.
 11. Just tell what happened. Here's the thing to remember—just report in your testimony what happened to you. Don't worry about what you think SHOULD have happened, what happened to your sister, or what you *really* want to preach to the listener. Just testify honestly and clearly what actually DID happen for you.
 12. Creatively:
 - a. Personal, face-to-face
 - b. E-mail
 - c. Instant Messaging
 - d. Blogging or newsletters
 - e. Written or lyrical (a song)
 - f. Video

WHEN?

4. Whenever there is opportunity. This means being alert and open and prayerful for chances to tell your story.
5. When you have a good moment with a non-Christian. Perhaps this is a time that you have WON by friendship and sincere interest IN the listener. They may even ask you for your story, or for guidance after you have demonstrated good friendship.
6. At times of fellowship when testimonies are invited. Among us, there are plenty of chances to testify and build us up with confidence. Believe me, we need your testimony and we need many of them.

We get much joy from hearing personally how God has worked. It really ministers to us and I believe we are sitting on a motherlode of wealth of testimony about how God has worked in our lives. Let's work at this. Let's witness for Christ by working up our own testimonies and looking for ways to share them!

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 17)

Scripture: 2nd Corinthians 9:13-15

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 25th, 2007

Following by Needing the Body

2 Corinthians 9:13-15 (NASB)

¹³ Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for *your* obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, ¹⁴ while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Introduction In 1976 my father received a telephone call from a woman in New Jersey, out of the blue, named Judy. She told him that she had reason to believe that her recently deceased father, a man named Thomas Churchill, was in fact my Dad's long lost brother, Emil Damgaard, who had disappeared from all knowledge in about 1926 (when my Dad was 14). This phone call began a series of meetings and comparisons of family records and pictures and documents which led to the unmistakable conclusion that Emil and Thomas were the same man and that Emil had become Thomas fifty years earlier, for reasons no one knew (around 1926) and had begun a completely new life. The lady, Judy, was one of two daughters he had. Other than their mother Helen, they had no other relatives at all, being told by Thomas that they were all dead. Overnight, I got two new cousins and an aunt. But more dramatically, overnight, Judy and Priscilla and their Mom, Helen inherited more than 80 blood relatives, as well as a rich family tradition, they never knew they had! That is something of the experience of the early Christians! Each gathering of Jesus-followers slowly discovered that they had "family" in other places. And although communication was much slower, gradually each assembly of Jesus-followers across the Roman empire discovered they were fundamentally bound and connected to many others and more and more were popping up around the empire. A "networking" started, which spread quickly.

We see this all over the New Testament and today I would like us to think a little about how we need the body of Christ, beyond the walls of our church. In fact, I think it is a basic part of "discipleship" and implicit in the Great Commission which Jesus gave to His disciples: ***Go therefore and make disciples...*** I certainly am sure that He did not intend all the new churches to be disconnected and wholly independent and uncaring about each other—such a world-view would grieve the very Spirit in whom they had been baptized. I think it is His program that all the new churches would be somehow connected, supportive and in need of each other. We read in 2

Corinthians 9 Paul's brokering of support for the Christians back in Judea (Israel) who were having a particularly hard time. That is what is embedded in this chapter, and the Corinthians participation in helping financially. The Corinthian Christians had evidently been especially generous in contributing to the project. By the way, the CORE of Christian teaching on giving is found in this chapter.¹ Christians should give cheerfully, systematically and generously—or we say, sacrificially. We hear of a need and we respond. We do this often and quickly. And we see it as a thing which God notices and which testifies to the authenticity of the other things we say, the Gospel, etc.

Not too many months after Paul wrote to the Corinthians he wrote to the Christians in Rome, saying that it was proper for the new Gentile Christians to reach out to help the Jewish Christians in need back in Judea. To them he said, ***For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. Romans 15:26, 27***

And of course in 1st Corinthians 12 Paul had laid out¹ the basic idea that the body of Christ is sort of like a human body with different appendages and organs all of which have a single head and are all connected and need each other (even when they might not think so.)

Well, so what of all this? What does it have to do with us? Whether or not we sense the body of Christ beyond this church, or not, what difference does it make? I would suggest a few things as to why we need the body of Christ...

1. First others in the body of Christ can reach where we cannot reach. Missionaries are special people with a calling by God to go all over the world where you can I cannot go, nor can most of the other Christians we know.
2. Second, it is a source of encouragement and amazement to see that God is working the same program in other places that He is working here. To see young people seeking Christ, learning His Word, striving to make a difference who are not from here, is a resource to my own Christian encouragement and joy. Conversely, if I isolate myself from other people I defraud myself of one of the channels through which I believe God wants to bless me.
3. Next, we can provide support to parts of the body of Christ who truly need our support, and we can be a blessing to their needs. This is a thing the New Testament seems so obviously to endorse and command of us.

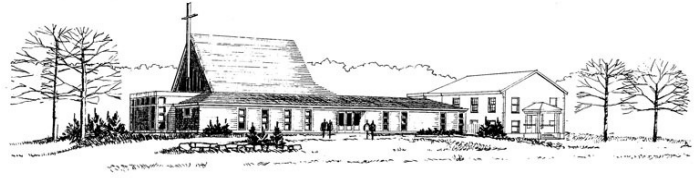
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4. Fourth, we learn of opportunities for ourselves, and for our young people to explore being used of God in new ways. We see what is possible. In the past year I have become aware of the Christian Medical Fellowship, an organization of medical professionals who donate their services in places where health care is almost non-existent. In the name of Jesus Christ. In fact, I hope we can learn more about that organization and look into getting involved ourselves.
 5. Fifth, needing the body of Christ, and contributing TO the body is an expression of worship and enjoinder with God's world-wide program—the kingdom! We can do a little here, and among ourselves. But we can sense that we are really following Jesus Christ when we recognize our need of the body beyond ourselves. There is something *worshipful* about that!

I hope you will make it a part of your own life's mission to recognize and support the body of Christ and to foster your own need of the body and your own ministry in the body beyond our own local assembly.

¹ Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. ⁷ Let each one *do* just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed (**2 Cor. 9:6-8**, NASB)

¹ For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those *members* of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly *members come to* have more abundant seemliness, ²⁴ whereas our seemly *members* have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, ²⁵ that there should be no division in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. **1**

Corinthians 12:12-27



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 18)

Scripture: John 17, etc.

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: March 4th, 2007

Following by Enduring With One Another

John 17:18-23 (NASB)

¹⁸ “As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰ “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, *art* in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; **that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.** ²² “And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, **that the world may know that Thou didst send Me**, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.

Introduction In John 17 we have one of the deepest and most incredible transcripts of any conversation ever held. It is between the Son of God and God the Father, although we can only hear the Son’s side of the conversation. It is in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the night before Jesus was crucified. It is called by scholars, “Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer.” Zooming in on verses 18-23 we see that

- Jesus has passed a commission on to His disciples that flowed out of the commission He had received from His Father.
- He set Himself apart for that purpose and He marks us out for the same work.
- Interestingly, in verse 20 He makes it clear that His movement won’t end with the eleven—it will spread to thousands, millions of people.
- He intends that these disciples and Gospel-bearers should stay together and that is so important because He has set His reputation with them.

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- To the extent that they can maintain their unity, is the extent of how seriously people will take *His* claims to be who He said He was.
 - And their unity also testifies to nothing less than the love of God for those disciples. It is a crucial prayer and a crucial prayer request.

There are plenty of other New Testament passages which call God's people to be unified with each other: Ephesians 2:13-15; 4:1-3; 4:30-32; Philippians 2:1-7; Colossians 3:9-14; 2nd Thess. 1:3,4; James 2:1-13; Hebrews 13:15-18, etc.

And yet...

❶ When Renée and I left Dallas in 1983 to come to DBC, we knew people who were part of probably a dozen large Bible-type churches, some of those several thousand members each. We had attended one of those churches for a year or so. In the years since then most of those churches have split, some very dramatically, and numerous new churches have formed.

❷ When Renée and I moved TO Dallas from Virginia in 1979, the church where I was later ordained, where Renée and I were married, had just hired an associate pastor who was the best friend of the pastor. Within two years that church had experienced a sad split and the subsequent forming of another church.

In our area here in Southcoast, during the mid-1990s three of our sister churches, all of whom had very friendly relations with us here, split apart and formed three additional churches. They were not amiable church-plantings. They were traumatic, harsh and frankly depressing splits. One of those churches then split again five years ago and is but a shell of what it once was.

❸ When Renée and I came to DBC in 1983 there were five men in leadership of this church. Within seven years four of those men were divorced. I cannot count how many other divorces we have watched occur.

❹ On the level of personal friendships within churches, I have watched many end their friendships with various of their brethren because of conflict, stress or offense. At one time they were happy to have coffee, spend evenings together and even go on vacations together; now if they speak to each other at all it is "hello" or the smallest small talk... Now, in none of these cases do we take any perverse delight or secret satisfaction—the way the carnal mind can so easily generate—nor do we smugly look in the mirror and think, "Well, YOU'RE pretty clever to have avoided all that." None. Ever.

Jesus prayed to His Father that His disciples would craft, figure out and experience a oneness that was nothing less than a good reflection of why Jesus came into the world and even how God's love itself, is. Jesus' apostles pleaded with the early churches and Christians to practice unity and to do anything

which might contribute to a feeling of singularity and one direction for themselves.

I wish to suggest to you this morning that part of basic “following Jesus” is to ENDURE WITH ONE ANOTHER. It’s not an option, a plug-in without which the discipleship program will run just fine. Jesus calls you and me to endure with each other. Let me put it more bluntly: we are simply not allowed to give up on each other. Whether it is a difference of opinion, or illness in old age together, or getting bored with each other or tired of each other; whether it is learning something more deeply about one another that we may find unsavory or whether it is suffering offense from each other; whether it is imagining greener grass across the way with another fellowship or another spouse or another friend, or NONE others and just imagining you can do better alone; whether it is violated boundaries or forcing profound disappointments with each other, we are simply not supposed to give up on each other. We are supposed to ENDURE with each other.

I do not think anyone told me this when I was a new Christian. In fact, I remember learning quite quickly in my Christian experience that Christians had political camps, factions, theological societies, second and third marriages, new churches formed by disillusioned members of old churches, and thinking, “hmmm.”

Enduring together is what we would do, if Jesus was literally in our midst every day, wouldn’t we? We would not say, if He were in the next room, “I can’t live with this person any more. I have been as patient as I wish to be.” If He were in our elders and diaconate meetings and sitting in our Bible fellowship groups, we would restrain thoughts like, “I think these people are beneath me—I think I will abandon them and go over and look at *that* fellowship.” We might think it, but if He were here, we would be more likely to endure with each other.

It seems to me that some other religious traditions have this principle of discipleship down a little better than our evangelicalism, which seems to form new fellowships and new marriages at the drop of a hat. Someone might say, “Well of course Catholics grit out their marriages and don’t look at divorce as an option so easily—they’re not allowed to.” Or, “Of course Catholics don’t form new parishes every week—it’s too hard and they have too much loyalty to their ways.” Yes? And your point? If we evangelicals took endurance more seriously, would there be so many small, struggling and sometimes temporary churches? Maybe there would be churches that were a little bigger and stronger? If we took endurance more to heart maybe our divorce rate would be a *little* less than the general population (and it is not.) And maybe, just perhaps, the loneliness

problem where we are starving for good, solid and dependable friendships might be less if we endured in friendship a little better.

To endure, we need to do several things.

1. First, like Jesus, I think we should pray for it. It ought to be part of our regular praying together, and reach to asking God to give a sense of fellowship and kinship between our churches, too.
2. We ought to forcibly remind each other that at one time all of us were, as Paul described himself and the Ephesian believers in Christ, **far off** and have been **brought near by the blood of Christ**. We too quickly get smug and proud as evangelical Christians. We need to remember our own past and recall that Jesus Christ is in the business of breaking down **dividing walls** not putting them up.
3. Humility and gentleness and patience is what ENDURING (or as Paul calls it, forbearance in love) is all about. The Greek word for “forbearance” is ANECHOMENOI [ἀνεχόμενοι] and it means to PUT UP WITH, to LISTEN and to BEAR UP WITH SOMEONE. You may say, “but that might hurt! Being patient under frustration doesn’t make me feel good.” So? Jesus never said the Christian life was always going to be easy or convenient. But this quality among His disciples was a thing Jesus Himself prayed for. It must be of high value, then.
4. Fourth, there are some specific things to AVOID, AVOID, AVOID and when we see that we’re NOT avoiding them, to lay them down and put them away from our hearts—privately and prayerfully: **bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor** and **slander**. Let’s remember also what Solomon wrote:
 - ***There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, ¹⁹ A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.*** Proverbs 6:16-19
5. Do not make decisions for selfish reasons, but instead, CONSIDER EACH OTHER AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOU. If we could somehow get our selfish “gland” removed we would be far more unified, as a movement. But Paul says that we can control selfish urges—and we are capable of putting other people in front of us, rather than demanding our rights all the time.
6. Forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you. The Lord’s Table is a time to remember, regularly, how much you have needed HIS forgiveness. Jesus strikingly said, **For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.** ¹⁵ **“But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not**

forgive your transgressions. Matthew 6:14-15 For some of us this is the hardest thing we do, as Christians. But do it we must, and WHEN we forgive each other –don't keep score—endurance is bolstered and spreads.

7. We need to AFFIRM the good things in other congregations, as Paul did in 2 Thess.1:4. When we talk well and carefully articulating about the good things other churches and ministries are doing, and the quality of their work in Christ, it promotes a good feeling between believers. Which in itself is a blessing!
8. Endurance is enhanced and motivated, when we insist that no one is given preferential treatment. We need to be aware of doing this, and seek NOT to do it. It promotes a feeling of oneness and unity when we speak and act fairly and mercifully with everyone in our body, and even with other churches.

Much is at stake, Jesus indicated, with how much we work on and how much we VALUE endurance with each other. His reputation, our sense of the Holy Spirit's presence. One can only wonder, if the Church in general was more enduring with itself, from local assembly, to Christian couples and within individual Christian friendships, if the Lord might not have come back sooner! Indeed, His coming may be soon now, when we will surely be a single body for Him, even, the Bride of Christ, full of grace and wonder!

Scriptures

Ephesians 2:13-15 (NASB)

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one*, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances*, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace,

Ephesians 4:1-3

¹ I, THEREFORE, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:30-32

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Philippians 2:1-7

¹ IF therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.

Colossians 3:9-14

⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him ¹¹ —*a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. ¹² And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ And beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; ⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

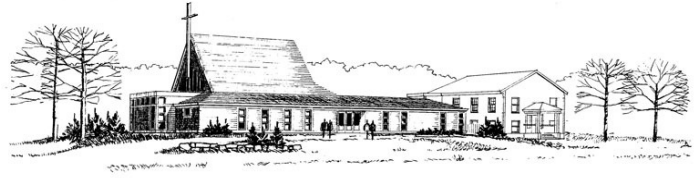
James 2:1-13

¹ MY brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. ² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? ⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a

transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Hebrews 13:15-18

¹⁵ Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. ¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. ¹⁷ Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. ¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 19)

Scripture: various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: March 11th, 2007

The FUEL of the Christian Life - Following by Serving and Sacrifice

Romans 16:1-4 (NASB)

¹ I COMMEND to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. ³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles

Introduction As we've talked about a number of various activities involved in following Christ, today there is another one that comes to mind. It is what I'm going to call the "FUEL" of the Christian life. It is the thing that really keep us going, and reinvigorates our drive and motivation to keep on for Christ. It is serving and sacrifice.

I have been a transportation fan my whole life—trains, airplanes and ships all interest me. But my favorite mode of transportation is by train. I particularly love old steam engines which disappeared from American rail in about 1960. My favorite old steam engine was not the Big Boy (although that one's pretty neat.) It is the Norfolk and Western "Y6b." What I want you to see today about the Y6b is not the engine itself, but what we call the "tender," the railcar that followed all steam engines. The tender carried the fuel—not oil or diesel fuel. Originally steam tenders carried wood to be burned in the engine's firebox. The firebox heated a tank of steam and the steam drove the engine. In the late 1800s

engines switched from wood-burning to coal-burning. The Y6b's tender was huge. It carried 27 tons of coal at a time, and 24,000 gallons of water. When the tender started to run out of coal and water, the train crew would need to find a coal bunker or coaling tower, and a water tower to re-fuel.

Fundamental to following Christ is the call to serve His purposes. And yet, anyone who has been a Christian for a while knows that there are many factors working to discourage us. And it seems to me that if a Christian is NOT serving he or she will become internally discouraged sooner or later—much like running out of fuel. I would like to suggest to you today that the fuel of the Christian life is the process of serving and learning sacrifice for Him. Every disciple that we read about in the New Testament was called to “follow” Him. That meant to believe that He was truly the Son of God. It meant to associate with other followers in a fellowship. It meant to gather with that fellowship for teaching and the breaking of bread and for prayer. But following Jesus often meant to obey Him by serving Him. In doing that, I believe we refuel our walk with the Lord.

There are many interesting “second tier” disciples in the New Testament who seem to make their names by serving and sacrifice. First up today is **Phoebe** whom is the first Christian servant we read about in Romans 16.¹ We wish Paul wrote more about her, but we can infer a number of commending things: She was exemplary of character and actions. Her name meant “bright and radiant” and that may well have characterized her personality and ministry. Paul calls her a “servant” [diakonos] which was a term used for helpers, people who served and people who gave of themselves. She was that, and very possibly may even have been the courier of the Letter to the Romans. Phoebe's drew her life's purpose I think, from serving her brothers and sisters in Christ and she is highly valued by the apostle Paul.

A second serving person, outside of the apostles, worth mentioning is **Timothy** mentioned in Philippians 2. Perhaps the most well-known of all the apostles' friends, Timothy as marked by a great love and concern for others, indeed uniquely interested in the Philippian Christians (vs.20). Most of us are a mixture of self-interest and some sincere interest in others' well-being. We vascillate between “what can I get from you?” and “so how ARE you really doing?” Timothy was mostly the latter. Paul could think of no others of the apostles' helpers that was more vitally interested in the Philippians' welfare. His serving is marked by an unselfish concern.

Epaphroditus is also mentioned in Philippians 2 as another of Paul's good associates. He felt for the Philippians' concern for his health. Paul calls him his brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, messenger and minister. Together

those five terms sound like a man caught up in serving and sacrificing. It was basic to His following of Jesus Christ. He went with the apostle, treated him closely as a brother, worked along side with no hierarchical feelings, was a fellow combatant in spiritual warfare, did Paul's communications as a messenger (no internet, e-mail or telecommunications). And he simply was a servant, a minister.

A fourth individual that Paul mentions was a man named **Tychicus** whose name appears in Ephesians 6, Colossians 4 and 2nd Timothy 4. Paul calls him a "beloved brother and faithful minister," again, not in the clergy sense but in the serving and helping sense. To that Paul adds "fellow-bond servant" in Colossians 4. He assisted with communications and tending messages, and suffered and sacrificed in the process.

So uneasy we might be, with the word "sacrifice." But this is the lifestyle of the early Christians and it is illustrated all through the New Testament. Being a Christian didn't mean just going to assembly and hearing the word. James wrote that faith without works is dead. Following Jesus meant engaging the work of the kingdom, utilizing whatever abilities they had. They differed in their abilities and capacities. But the real followers of Jesus Christ MADE THEMSELVES available to help and they gave of themselves sacrificially, sometimes even being willing to risk their lives. And they RECEIVED something back, I think. Serving and sacrificing gives you something back; you feel re-fueled by serving and by sacrificing—at least often. Now, none of us likes to be taken advantage of, or taken for granted. Sacrifice that is not appreciated makes the sacrifice even MORE of a sacrifice. But when I have served the Lord, and it has cost me, I know the thing I did was really for HIM. And He gives back a sense of blessing that keeps me going. That's really what I mean by FUEL.

I'm afraid sacrifice is pretty far from a lot of "pop Christianity." Yes, we have a percentage of people in our churches who are marvelous servants and yes there IS sacrifice that happens. But when we say sacrifice we mean sacrifice that costs something significant. Our bar needs to be higher in the sacrificing for each other department. Paul wrote to the Romans, ***I URGE you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*** (Rom.12:1,2). I would rather have a church of 50 positive and willing servants, whose lives are laid on the line for Christ, than 450 church attenders and 50 servants, doing most of the work.

To serve you have to ask “what can I do?” And you probably need to know that you are probably capable of doing more than you think you are. Second we need to seek out training in how to serve. Third we need to get over the inconvenience thing. If you’re inconvenienced by serving, so what? Get over it. We all struggle with the flesh and that’s something we should often pray about, NOT letting the flesh win in our decision-making. Fourth we need to have a long-term rather than a short-term attitude. “I’m in it for the long-haul” with you, ought to be the message we get from one another—NOT “I’ll TRY this ministry with you, until I get offended or until I get tired of it.”

Well, I think you get the point. Following Jesus involves serving, in ways we can be of help. You don’t have to help where you cannot do it. But following Jesus involves serving Him with whatever you CAN do, and serving in a sacrificial way sometimes. We train ourselves in this, and get more and more used to it. I know, it doesn’t come naturally.

I love it when I hear about our youth going to a nursing home. That’s not natural. But its serving and it’s a little sacrificial.

I love it when we have a work day on a Saturday and lots of people come because it’s a little bit of a sacrifice.

I love it when someone gives someone a ride to Logan Airport because that is a sacrifice.

I appreciate it when our counters tell me someone gave a special gift, out of the ordinary because that’s sacrificial.

I am happy and glad when someone takes a class to teach or to assist because that’s serving and its not always exciting.

We never look more like Jesus than when we serve and help, and we do it cheerfully and at some cost. He is honored and He is being worshipped when that happens. We follow Him by serving Him and by absorbing the cost it takes to do that. And it testifies to a real and genuine relationship with Him, who is our Savior, who is our King, who is our Bridegroom.

SCRIPTURES:

Philippians 2:19-30 (NASB)

¹⁹ But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰ For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *servi*

his father. ²³ Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things *go* with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly. ²⁵ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about* you. ²⁹ Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

Ephesians 6:21-22 (NASB)

²¹ But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. ²² And I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.

Colossians 4:7-17 (NASB)

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know *about* our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here. ¹⁰ Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also* Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and *also* Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and *also* Demas. ¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

2 Timothy 4:9-13 (NASB)

⁹ Make every effort to come to me soon; ¹⁰ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. ¹² But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.

¹ Paul devotes these two verses to the commendation of a single individual, **Phoebe, ... a servant** and a member **of the church which is at Cenchrea**. Cenchrea was the neighboring port city of Corinth, from which Paul wrote this letter, and **the church... at Cenchrea** doubtless was a daughter church of the one at Corinth. It was from Cenchrea, at the end of his first ministry in Corinth, that Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila “put out to sea for Syria” (Acts 18:18).

Paul could **commend** this woman not only for what she had done as a faithful **sister** and **servant** of Christ but also for what she was soon to do in further service to their Lord. It is almost certain that **Phoebe** delivered this letter in person to the church at Rome, a responsibility of considerable magnitude.

The name **Phoebe** means “bright and radiant,” and from Paul’s brief comments about her, it seems that those words did indeed characterize her personality and her Christian life. Paul commends her to the church at Rome in three different ways: as a sister in Christ, as **a servant** and as **a helper of many**, including himself.

In Christ, we belong to God not only as “fellow citizens with the saints” in His divine kingdom but also are brothers and sisters in His di- vine “household” (Eph. 2:19). To refer to Phoebe as **our sister** meant that she was a devoted member of the family of God, and the context makes clear that she was especially dear to Paul.

Paul next commends **Phoebe** as **a servant** beloved by those she served in her home church **at Cenchrea**, and probably in the mother church at Corinth as well.

Servant translates *diakonos*, the term from which we get *deacon*. The Greek word here is neuter and was used in the church as a general term for servant before the offices of deacon and deaconess were developed. It is used of the household servants who drew the water that Jesus turned into wine (John 2:5, 9), and Paul has used the term earlier in this letter (Rom. 13:4, twice) to refer to secular government as “a minister of God to you for good” and even of Christ as “a servant to the circumcision,” that is, to Jews (15:8). When *diakonos* obviously refers to a church office, it is usually transliterated as “deacon” (see, e.g., Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:10, 13).

In 1 Timothy 3:11, Paul declares that “women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.” Some argue that he is referring to wives of deacons, rather than to an office of women deacons. But it makes no sense that high standards would be specified for the wives of deacons but not for wives of overseers (or bishops, who are also called elders, see Titus 1:5), whose qualifications he has just given in verses 1–7. In this context (3:1–10, 12–13), the office of deaconess is clearly implied. The “likewise” in verse 11 ties the qualifications of these women to those already given for the offices of overseer and deacon. In verse 11, Paul did not refer to those women as deaconesses because *diakonos* has no feminine form.

During the first few centuries of the church, the role of a woman **servant** (*diakonos*) was to care for fellow believers who were sick, for the poor, for strangers passing through, and for the imprisoned. They also were responsible for helping baptize and disciple new women converts and to instruct children and other women.

Whether or not Phoebe held some official title or not, Paul commended her as a highly-proven **servant** of Christ and implored the church at Rome to **receive her in the Lord**.

As mentioned above, Phoebe was entrusted with carrying this letter to the church at Rome. There were, of course, no copiers or carbon paper in those days, and even the simplest writing materials were very expensive. It is therefore highly unlikely that Paul, through the hand of Tertius (v. 22), made more than one copy of this letter. Since Paul realized that letter would become part of God's written Word, he knew that the truths he imparted in this letter had the mark of divine authenticity. He would therefore have made certain that this epistle to the Romans was entrusted only to the most reliable of persons.

Paul knew that the journey from Corinth to Rome would not be easy, and would involve considerable sea as well as land travel. When this special lady arrived in Rome and presented believers there with Paul's letter, they must have realized his great trust in her even before they read this personal commendation. It would be immediately evident that she deserved their greatest appreciation and respect.

Travel in those days was often hazardous, and the few inns that existed usually were connected with the worst sort of taverns, many of which were also brothels. The only safe places to stay were with a friend or a friend of a friend. Consequently, letters of commendation were routinely given to travelers by friends who had relatives or friends along the way who could provide food, lodging, and sometimes escort through dangerous areas. Such help was especially important for Christians and even more especially for those who were Jewish, who often were subjected to persecution not only by Gentiles but by unbelieving fellow Jews.

Such letters of commendation are mentioned several times in the New Testament. When Apollos "wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren [at Ephesus] encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him" (Acts 18:27). Paul included a commendation of Titus and certain other faithful men in his second letter to Corinth, saying, "As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you" (2 Cor. 8:23-24). John alludes to such a written commendation in verse 9 of his third epistle.

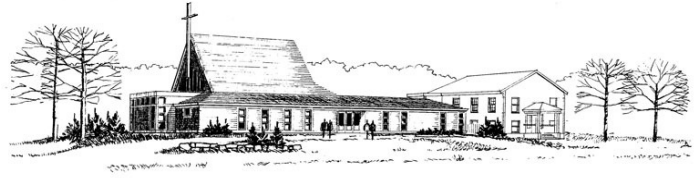
Phoebe was to be received into fellowship **in a manner worthy of the saints**, that is, as a true and faithful believer. Jesus promised that when believers minister to "one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them," they do it for Him (Matt. 25:35-40). Christians are to **receive**, to love, to minister to each other in a way that is distinct from the world around us and that it cannot comprehend. We are to embrace, serve, and care for all those who genuinely name the name of Christ (cf. Matt. 18:5-10).

Paul requested that the Roman church **help** Phoebe **in whatever matter she may have need of** them for. **Matter** is from *pragma*, from which we get *pragmatic*, and refers to anything that was done or carried out. It was often used of business transactions, and probably carries that idea here, as indicated by the King James's rendering of "business." Paul not only was giving a commendation of Phoebe as a faithful Christian but also was giving a letter of reference, as it were, in regard to whatever business **matter** she may have had in Rome.

That idea is reinforced by Paul's speaking of her as a **helper**, which translates *prostatis*, which was commonly used to signify a patron, a wealthy person who encouraged and financially supported an organization or cause, as in a patron of the arts. In other words, Phoebe was no ordinary **helper**, but one of high esteem and integrity and likely was a businesswoman of considerable wealth. She used her influence and her financial means, as well as her personal time and effort, as **a helper of many fellow believers and of myself [Paul] as well**.

That statement says as much about Paul as it does about Phoebe. The esteemed apostle readily and graciously acknowledged his personal indebtedness to and love for a Christian sister, whom he memorialized in these two verses in the Word of God. And, although God inspired no woman to write a part of Scripture, he used Phoebe to transport the first copy of

this marvelous letter, which is one of the bedrocks of New Testament theology. This woman was emblematic of those countless women of God whom He has used and honored with great distinction within the framework of His divine plan. (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Romans*).



Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Following Jesus Christ (Lesson 20)

Scripture: Passages in Hebrews

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: March 18th, 2007

Following in Longevity

Hebrews 10:19-25 (NASB)

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

Introduction What is the longest you've done anything? Some of you are golfers. How long have you done that? Some of you have committed yourself to dieting and eating well. How long has that been working for you? Some of us are Red Sox fans. For how long? Some of us are married. How long has that lasted?

So let me ask, how long will your Christian faith last? How long will your pursuit of Christ last? How long will you hang in there with having to walk by faith? Do you still feel a thrill if you hear news that someone new has become saved? How long will you hold close your faith in Christ?

Chances are, you are going to say, "Forever." And that is what I want us to think about today, as we consider another element of discipleship—PERSPECTIVE. There are lots of things we do, lots of pursuits, that we really have no intention of it lasting forever. We get into new interests which we expect

to last a while. We even move into a new home or apartment but it doesn't occur to us, "Is this where I'm going to live for the rest of my life?" We move from one thing to another... We change vehicles, clothing styles, jobs and even careers, hobbies, sometimes churches, sometimes families... CHANGE is a part of life. So, will you change your basic, core philosophy? Will you still be a Christian in say, 40 years?

I think of the last "first Christians" to die. John the apostle would be among them. Some tradition says that Mary, Jesus' mother, lived to be an older lady, in western Turkey, in the Ephesus area. Other disciples lived out lives waiting on Jesus to come back again. None of those first century Christians had any printed Bibles. None had the civil protection, let alone respect, of the state. None possessed any Christian music yet, other than the book of Psalms and they had no Christian counseling centers to go and get encouragement and wisdom. Their lives are studies in resolute courage and determination, still warm from the embers of the apostles' eye-witness accounts of Jesus.

But there are lots of pressures why people might NOT stay with Jesus, as Lord and Savior.

- ♦ Some people just get tired of waiting and living by faith. They go, "Hey, when do *I* get some?"
- ♦ Others get spiritually distracted, slowly, their faith-life deteriorating gradually, more and more, until there just isn't any more belief left in them. C.S. Lewis illustrates this pretty powerfully in the person of Susan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.
- ♦ Others get defeated by conflict with other Christians. They give up because it's just too hard to keep struggling with others' egos and their different ways.
- ♦ Other yet become deceived by an aberration or a false teaching and they end up abandoning a true pursuit of Jesus Christ and following a false concept of Him.
- ♦ Still others attach themselves to some other PERSON who has no interest in Jesus and their love for Him just fades and dies...
- ♦ Finally, some re-think their original commitment to Jesus and make a decision to GO BACK to their old belief system.

All of which brings us back to the Letter to the Hebrews. This book contains some isolated verses which we like to sample or even memorize. But the overall context of the letter, written to some group of first-century Hebrew believers in Jesus as Messiah, is to say, "Do not turn back from Jesus." Those believers were tempted, apparently, to abandon the pursuit of Christ and to go back to being orthodox Jews. And the Letter to the Hebrews basically acknowledges this as a problem and addresses the matter so well.

Hebrews contains three passages which some believers interpret to mean that ultimately a true, born-again, regenerate, saved, Spirit-baptized believer CAN once and for all, undo himself, and lose his salvation and become eternally lost even though he was once eternally saved. Those passages are called by Bible students the “warning passages” and they are in chapters 3, 6 and 10.

In 3:12-19 the writer warns against falling into unbelief. If someone, anyone (***any of you***), whether they SAY they are Christians or not, falls into the pit of unbelief there is no getting out. Faith is the only way out of judgment. But unbelief inevitably results in a hardening of heart and a state of being deceived into thinking that sin is not so bad. Flee to Christ, and once you have done so stay with Him. In one sense everyone who has given in to sin, has fallen away from God. He offers a being-bought-out from sin. But any community of believers can contain people who LOOK like “brethren.” They are not insulated by the community if there is unbelief in their hearts. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of us to ***encourage*** each other ***day after day as long as it is still called today***. And as we each persevere and continue on, and if we hold fast the ***beginning of our assurance until the end*** we are true partakers of Christ. The logic is simple. You cannot decide to abandon your faith and yet still possess it.

In 6:4-6 we read, ***For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame***. I do not believe this indicates that a true Christian can UNDO his or her salvation but that IF a professing person abandons faith in Christ, they will not get another way in. The chance for repentance, once rejected cannot be replaced. “Appearances notwithstanding, such people were never born again or made genuine partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ.¹” I think we need to have a real healthy respect for the degree to which a person can counterfeit true faith in Christ. He can simulate faith in quite convincing ways—he might even fool himself. He could go to assemblies where miracles were even be performed and witness them and even rejoice in them. He could hear, and to some extent understand the Word being taught. For all intensive purposes he can LOOK like a truly regenerate person. But alas! If he or she ultimately abandons Christ, they will not find another way in front of them.

In 10:19-27 we have the third warning passage. It is not talking about truly saved people. It is talking about make a decision to “Deliberately keep on sinning.” This doesn’t refer to the immense sinfulness that remains in every believer’s life, over which one mourns, of which one repents, and for which one

turns to Christ (4:15–5:12), but to the renunciation of the faith (3:12; 6:6). If, having once become acquainted with and having laid claim to the final and perfect sacrifice of Christ, one rejects it as his hope of salvation, all hope is forever lost. The Levitical sacrifices that this readership is tempted to prefer cannot make anyone perfect, and God will not grant repentance to apostates. This striking and grim definition of apostasy is a reminder of how differently the same thing may appear to a human and to God. What the apostate defends as a calculated step to serve his best interests, God regards as contempt for his beloved Son, disdain for the terrible suffering and death he endured, and as an outrage against the Holy Spirit, impeaching his testimony to Christ's lordship (6:4; 1 John 5:6, 10).¹ There is no better way to live than to follow Christ. You will not find a BETTER way than Him.

So vital is the question, "Will I really press on to the end?" that perhaps Jonathan Edwards' most important writing was one he published in 1746 called *The Religious Affections*.¹ In this book he carefully lays out what he thought were twelve signs of true growth and perseverance in a Christian. Christian thinkers of earlier years are often deeper and more careful (in my opinion) than most Christian writers today.

Today I am asking you, "How long is your perspective about your faith? How long do we intend to continue seeking Christ?" Part of following Jesus Christ as a disciple is to understand that discipleship is permanent. When a person becomes a Christian they need to realize that despite what comes my way, I am going to be a person of faith. We need to provide the help to keep each other going. "Encouragement" is mentioned in 3:13, 6:9,10 and 10:24,25. We are intended to NEED EACH OTHER. We are intended to assist and help each other and basically we spend the rest of our lives figuring out how to do that.

Longevity in the faith is fundamental to the call to discipleship. But not everyone lasts until the end of the course. Will we still be seeking Christ decades from now? You might say, "But no one is motivating me sufficiently!" You must find your own drive for Christ. You must hunger for Him on your own. No one can provide that. You must arrive at your own sense of Psalm 42:1 !

I want to assure you that if you determine, here and now—and what could be a finer act of worship—you will make it there. You may go through "many dangers, toils and snares" but you will reach the end of the road with your faith intact, if you decide to do so. The Lord will assist you. He will never leave nor forsake you, though others may. He will reinvigorate your heart and your determination over and over again. He will remind you of the cross and that which Jesus endured. You will hear heroic stories of Christian perseverance and your heart will WANT more stories like that. He will bless you as you seek Him.

¹ Gerald McDermott summarized and contemporized the twelve signs of true spirituality that Edwards identified, in his 1995 book *Seeing God*

1. Your faith has a divine and supernatural source
 2. Attraction to God & His ways for their own sake
 3. Seeing the beauty of holiness
 4. A new knowing
 5. Deep-seated conviction
 6. Humility
 7. A change of nature
 8. A Christ-like Spirit
 9. Fear of God
 10. Balance
 11. Hunger for God
- Surrender and Perseverance

Scripture: Luke 18:18-30

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

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How Do You Tell Sammy Sosa He is Not Saved?

Luke 18:18-30 (NASB)

And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰ "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" ²¹ And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth." ²² And when Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." ²³ But when he had heard these things, he became very sad; for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And they who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God." ²⁸ And Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own *homes*, and followed You." ²⁹ And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

Introduction I'm not sure if you know who Sammy Sosa is, but this isn't really a message about Sammy Sosa. I wanted to call it "How do you tell "So and So" He is not saved?" but I didn't think that would work, so I'm using Sammy as a name... I've got a friend we will call Sammy. Sammy is a fellow I've known for quite a while and we're buddies. He knows me pretty well and I know him. We have the same kind of sense of humor and we go back quite a ways. When we see each other we tell old jokes and laugh. Sammy has a *certain* kind of spiritual sensitivity. He occasionally brings up spiritual things and he suspects there might be a God. But Sammy isn't saved. How do I know? Well, I don't know absolutely for sure because we can never see completely into a person's heart to know what their real spiritual condition is. But we remember what Paul said in Romans 8:16 ***The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*** Internally, Paul says, we sense the Spirit confirming that we are Christians and we don't want to make too much of a stretch with this, but it seems the Spirit bears witness somehow between us too. You perhaps have had the experience of meeting someone new, out of the blue, and you can just sense that the person knows the Lord. That is really very subjective but it seems to be true, at least sometimes. Similarly, with Sammy, I can just tell he does not know the Lord yet. I may be wrong. I hope I am wrong, but I don't think I am. I believe he still needs to find the Lord. A work of grace still needs to happen. He has yet to come to understand that he has ***fallen short of the glory of God.*** He is not sure salvation itself is a real thing, or just something Christians imagine. And finally, he is suspect of anyone associated with churches.

Jesus had many conversations where it was obvious that the person did not have a saving knowledge of the Lord yet. In Luke 18 we have the story of the rich young ruler. The man is asking the right question.

And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Luke 18:18

Jesus brilliantly takes it where it needs to go—to demonstrate that the man is a sinner. He didn't *think* he was a sinner, but the climax comes in verse 23 ***But when he heard these things he became very sad for he was very rich.*** Jesus invites him to do the one thing he hasn't done—liquidate his assets, and ***distribute it to the poor***—and then go and follow Him. This made it clear to the man himself, that he wasn't ready to do that... He was still lost.

I don't know if you can even envision yourself telling someone right out, "You're not saved." It seems blunt. It has high potential to be misunderstood. It seems elitist. It seems politically incorrect. We might approach it from several directions:

- We might say, "You're not saved."

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- We might say, “Have you considered the possibility that you really haven’t met the Lord yet?”
 - You might invite them to some event where there’s a speaker who DOES have the courage to tell them, “You’re not saved” or ask them, “Have you...”
 - We might download raw Bible verses at them like John 3 or Romans 6 and hope that they somehow understand what those verses are saying...

--But they need the information. If our Gospel is true (and it is, of course) then people need with the greatest urgency to realize that the Gospel presupposes that people need to be saved. And if they are not saved, then they are lost, or as Paul calls it, ***dead in their sins***. So how do you tell Sammy or whomever is in your life, they are not saved?

You can’t.

The first reason you cannot is because much of the time, you do not want to. Most of the time you are in relationship with people you care about. It is a spouse, child, parent, brother or sister or your co-worker or your girlfriend or boyfriend or just your friend. You don’t want to offend them. You don’t want to turn them off and shut them down so they won’t allow you to speak of spiritual things. And perhaps you remember all too well that for YOU, coming to faith in Christ required a humbling and a great subordination of your will and pride to God. And you don’t relish the thought of confronting your friend with that situation. We forget how amazing grace is, and we secretly want to bypass the sin question and just have people come easily into a love relationship with a loving Father, without brokering the issue of lostness and everyone’s complete inability to merit their own rescue.

We also know that ultimately, and truly, we cannot convict anyone of sin or of their lostness. The human will is too much in bondage and too used to sin to bow to OUR meager attempts to convince people of sin. In our own strength you and I will probably just fail to bring lostness up. We will make excuses; we will procrastinate; we will allow ourselves to be intimidated

But I want you to remember something: To tell someone they are lost is not something to be ashamed of. It is not abusing them, disrespecting them or belittling them. IT IS NOT! It is the first point someone *needs* to know, in order to be rescued from judgment and from sin. We are not trying to control or manipulate people. We know we cannot do that anyway. We are seeking to win the chance to share about Christ and the good news of what He offers as a free gift. The world these days is doing its best to make us feel bad about the Great Commission.

And the world is too sophisticated and tricky and deceptive. We cannot really tell people, in our own strength, that they are not saved. Only the Spirit can really convince people of sin. Only He can open a person's heart and shed light on his or her desperate condition.

You must.

On the other hand, we **MUST** tell people that they are lost without Christ and being lost, they are not saved. This is the great deception of our day. People want to think that they are lost and saved at the same time. But they are not. They are either saved and born-again and regenerate, or they are not saved, lost, still in their sins.

If you were walking by your friend's two story home, and you saw him in the window, sitting in his second floor bedroom, reading the paper. And you saw a fire starting to burn in the downstairs, wouldn't you want to warn him? If you were on a ship, and you knew it had sprung a leak and was going to sink, wouldn't you want to tell your friend to get out of his room and go to the lifeboat?

We actually do a great *disservice* to people by **NOT** telling them what the Bible says about man's condition apart from Christ. ***“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”*** Luke 12:5

Jesus told an incredible story in Luke 16:19-31. We know the story as “Lazarus and the Rich Man.” And in that story the rich man asks Abraham, ***I beg you Father send [Lazarus] to my father's house for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.*** I have always found this parable—if indeed it IS that—fascinating. Fascinating because Jesus seems to be teaching some things about the after-life here, pretty obviously. And to enter the after-life **WITHOUT** grace and without Christ, seems to be something to be avoided! We **MUST** get across to people that there are two states in life: the state of being saved and rescued from sin and the state of being **NOT** saved, and still in danger of eternal judgment. It is such a dramatic and final reality that I can't imagine why we would think anything else can possibly be more important...

You will.

Finally, let me suggest that to the question, “How can we tell Sammy Sosa he is not saved?” we must see that **YOU WILL**. If you are a Christian who wants to hear the voice of the Lord in your life, you will seek Him to open doors and

give ways to get the idea across to people that without Christ, they are not saved. I thought Pastor Nathan Hall made it clear on Good Friday evening when he said to us all: *for those of us who have gone to church every Sunday faithfully, it doesn't get us anything with God. For those of us who are faithful to our spouses for 50 years and never even ONCE stray and look at another person, IT DOESN'T GET US ANYTHING WITH GOD. For those of us who tithe and pray and read our Bibles for decades and decades, it doesn't get us anything with God.* A person needs Christ to reconcile himself or herself to God. And if you and I are walking in the Spirit we WILL find some way to say to that non-Christian around us, they are not saved. We will try to do it carefully and reasonably and gently and clearly. We will try not to confuse the person with self-righteousness or smugness on our part. We will try to use the Bible surgically and not defensively in sharing what the Word of God says about man's condition. **BUT WE WILL DO IT.** I take some comfort in what Jesus said to His disciples in Luke 12:12 ***for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.***"

I can think of many times when I have shyed away from telling people or teaching them, or somehow getting the point across that they really are not saved yet. But this is part of evangelism. It is part of what the Bible calls ***the whole counsel of God.*** It is part of following Jesus. He never told His disciples, when He sent them out to be sure to not ruffle anyone's feathers. He never told them to look for ways to link all people in harmony and craft some sort of unity apart from that produced by the Holy Spirit. He told them to make disciples, baptize them and teach them to obey Christ.

We must not shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God, my friends. I do not believe the full Gospel has anything in it about receiving the Holy Spirit in stages. But I do think it includes the full message that Jesus communicated. People need to know that they are lost. We cannot convict their spirits of that, but we can communicate what Jesus communicated. May God give us clear thinking and courage to include ALL the aspects of the Gospel message with the people to whom He has called us to witness of Him.