



# THE JOURNEY

**EMMAUS TO PENTECOST**

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## Preface

What is this book all about? This is the question we always ask. And secondly, why a series of studies about the pastor and mission?

Well, this book reconnects the pastor with the primary work given to him by God, to disciple people to go to all the world and preach the gospel. This includes across the street, across social barriers, across the country, and around the world. It is about looking at where we are and where we need to be. The idea for this book was suggested to me by my friend, Rodrigo Soto Yefi from Santiago, Chile, almost two years ago. He was concerned that so many pastors either did not understand why they should be involved in missions or had lost their focus. He invited me to lunch and challenged me to think about the need to motivate pastors in God's mission and the process involved in mobilizing pastors and others in the mission of God.

Why the pastor? As we talked it became clear that God often uses pastors and key leaders to call others to serve in missions. Actually the largest portion of those serving as pastors and in missions share that it was through such a person that God spoke to them and confirmed his call on their life. Pastors are a key group in motivating others to become involved.

It has taken two years of thinking, praying and studying to format a strategy to understand the issues, and set a plan for this material and others that will expand on what is covered here. In this process I began to realize that the most successful pastors are not always those that have large congregations. Those that have the greatest impact are those who focus on calling others into ministry. One pastor may have a congregation of 500 but have little impact beyond the walls of his facility. Another pastor has a congregation of 100 but focuses on discipling others and God's call into ministry. If he successfully discipled only 5 and each of them pastors a congregation of 100 and repeats the process, then the impact of the smaller church is much greater. It is not hard to see what happens when the focus is on sending people into mission.

This book is about what happens when we adopt this radical lifestyle, this focus on mission, that will change the direction of our life and ministry. This life was experienced by the apostles as they moved from the road to Emmaus, back to Jerusalem, and then Pentecost. It is a chance to review what happened as they spent time reviewing and relearning what they had already been taught but so quickly had forgotten. The apostles thought they knew it all but soon learned how much had been

prepared for them by Jesus. At Pentecost it all came together and the world would never be the same.

What is this book about? It is about capturing something of what happened in those days between the resurrection and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Why is it about the pastor and mission? Because, those called to lead the church need to be encouraged and renewed in their commitment to the mission, to go to the world, to preach the gospel (no, more than that, to make disciples), to baptize those who believe, and to teach them to obey all of the words of Jesus. Or, in other words, to equip those who hear, respond, and commit their lives to be able to do the same with the people God brings into their lives.

I invite you to join me in a journey of 50 days. To journey from Emmaus, a time of disillusion and confusion, to Pentecost, the day the mission, promised by Jesus, (that each of us is called to) began. Each of us needs to take this journey. It matters not where we are in our current ministry, from struggling with the challenges to experiencing God's blessing. It is always good to review and be revitalized.

I pray that what I have learned from preparing for this journey and sharing it with you will be a blessing and a challenge as we travel from the day of Christ's resurrection until the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

## Introduction

It took 50 days to take a group of scared, no terrified people, and prepare them to carry out an impossible mission, to proclaim the gospel to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation in the ends of the world. This was an incredible time of restoration, review, and preparation to receive God's blessing and mandate. This time period would forever change the understanding of how to serve, in love, the God who had proved His love for each and every person.

As we begin this process we need to keep in mind that this process was not solely focused on the disciples (the original group minus one). It had a much broader focus and a larger group. During Jesus' ministry there were 72 others who were sent out in ministry. There were also many others who followed Jesus but did not give up all to follow him every day and be with him the entire time. We are also aware that there were 120 who gathered in the upper room for the final period of prayer. If we accept Paul's history, then at times there were over 500 people who went through some portion of this review and preparation. If this only related to the counting of men then we could easily expand this number to a couple of thousand people - men, women, youth and children.

We also need to keep in focus the incredible shift and transformation that occurred. This group of people cowered in the darkness, afraid that at any moment someone would expose them and they too would be arrested and convicted because of their association with Jesus. Rome was ruthless in how it dealt with anything that even suggested a rebellion. This fact and the intense hatred of the leaders for Jesus and anyone associated with him, meant their lives would remain at risk until both groups decided they were no longer a threat.

So we have a group of men, hiding, cowering in secret. Well, as hidden as possible when all the world knows who you are. Remember they had just spent 5 days with Jesus in the temple. Five highly visible days, which meant they were well known by all. If the leaders had chosen to offer a reward for information about where they were hiding, it is hard to imagine that no one would come forward to claim such a reward. It is one thing for one person to hide but to hide 11 men and the others with them, especially with the rumors spreading about the missing body. Impossible!

So intense was the situation that two of them decided they had to leave the city. (This is a topic we will explore in one of the studies.) On their way to Emmaus they encountered the risen Lord and so the journey to Pentecost began. A journey that would turn this bunch of cowering, frightened fugitives into the first ranks of an army of volunteers that

would defy all threats and attacks to proclaim the gospel and carry out the mission that was given to them and all who would listen to them.

And so we are ready to begin. Ready to understand what changed in their lives and thinking, and what that change means to every one of us, especially those called to lead the people of God into the world. Each day there will be a scripture, a study of that scripture and a challenge to respond to. There will be 50 of them in total.

This study is set up to begin on Easter Sunday and finish 50 days later on Pentecost Sunday. If this time frame doesn't work for you then find 50 days where you can make the commitment to take on the 50 day challenge of Emmaus to Pentecost.

Let the journey began.



## The Journey - Day 01 - Preconceptions

*Luke 24:11-12 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.*

Before we can even begin the journey we need to deal with our preconceived ideas of what is possible and how God can work. In the morning, and later that night, God provides four opportunities for the eleven and those with them to believe, to be ready for the fulfillment of many promises, and to continue the work Jesus had begun.

A quick review of those four events will be helpful.

- The women encountered the angels who declare that Jesus has risen
- Mary Magdalena encountered the Lord in the Garden
- Peter and John ran and saw the empty tomb
- The two men encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus

The comments of Luke help us realize that with all of this evidence the eleven and those with them struggled to overcome their doubt and disbelief. They decided the women were hallucinating and delirious with grief. They chose not to trust Mary Magdalena; she was too emotionally attached and very dependent on the Lord. Peter and John had nothing new to offer and could only confirm one thing, the tomb was indeed empty. And regarding those two men who talked with Jesus on the road and invited him in, maybe they were drunk or maybe they had become like the women, so distraught that they were imagining things.

Everything they were hearing was impossible, physically, culturally and emotionally. Why? Well:

- Dead people don't raise themselves from the grave
- The Roman Guard doesn't fail
- Common people don't lead, especially women

And each of us could add to this list our own reasons for not believing, not accepting what God is doing. Why? Well:

- We don't truly believe God has complete control of creation
- We don't truly believe God is not bound by the system: cultural, social, or any other system.

- We don't truly believe God can work through anyone: man, woman, youth, or even a child.

And so we struggle to believe what others are telling us about what God is doing. We don't say it but in our mind and heart we declare, "I just can't believe it." Sometimes we reject the information out of jealousy or a sense of superiority. We say in our heart and mind, "God would never use them and not me." We will even use the system to avoid accepting the evidence by saying, "the leaders did not approve this."

On this particular day after the resurrection all the preconceptions are being dealt with.

- The lowliest people (in this culture), the women, get the news. So much for man's ego and pride. So much for control by the hierarchy.
- The existing power structure is set aside. The Romans, the Sanhedrin, the power of Satan, none of them have control over God's actions. A new structure has come that will not be bound by man and his concept of who is in control and what can be done. So much for the control of the world.
- The reign of God has come and nothing in all of creation can limit God's plan. Death, the final barrier, is eliminated. The chasm between heaven and earth loses its meaning. God's will is entering the world and man has to live by a completely different set of rules. So much for the control found in anything else.

We must deal with each of these are issues if we are to take the journey from Emmaus to Pentecost. We must decide if we are willing to let God reveal himself in any manner and through any person that he chooses, even if it is not through me. We must decide who has more authority in our lives, the risen Lord or our structures - the church, the culture, or the society. These all can become a barrier or a confirmation. Which will it be? We must decide, if in fact, God has absolute control of the universe. All of it including my little portion of this universe.

When Jesus came to the disciples and followers his questions and comments were revealing.

- Why are you troubled? (Luke 24:38)
- Why are you doubting what you see? (Luke 24:38)
- Why is your faith so weak? (Mark 16:14)
- Why are you so stubborn to believe those who have seen me? (Mark 16:14)

These are questions that will help us in dealing with the issues above.

What is it that is troubling us? Are we truly seeking God or just our comfort in this place and in this time? We need to become willing to deal with the risks of making the changes God wants to make. These are changes that we need to make so we will be able to hear his message and direction for each of us.

What is causing us to doubt what God is revealing? Do we have a problem with pride or self-worth? Don't we trust God with our lives? We need to face our fears and set aside our doubt.

Why is our faith so weak? Are we truly listening to God's Word and letting God reveal himself to us? Or are we dependent on ourselves and only trust what we can do and always limit God by using ourselves as the measure of what is possible?

Why are you so stubborn? There are so many reasons for this question. This is the key to the rest. Hopefully as we move forward on the journey we will be able to answer each of these questions and deal with each of the issues.

If we truly want God's reign to come to earth and are honestly praying for God's will, then we must deal with these. If not, then we are refusing to be obedient and risk condemning many to an eternity without God. Strong words, but so true. Imagine what would have happened if the eleven and the others with them had refused to listen to the risen Lord.

Pastors we are responsible to hear God, no matter how he speaks to us or through whom he speaks. Are you listening to hear God speak? Are you ready to believe and do what God has called you to do?

## **The Journey - Day 02 - Emmaus**

*Luke 24:13-14 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.*

This day began with astounding news. The body was gone, angels had met with the women, Mary Magdalena claimed to have seen the Lord, and Peter and John had seen the empty tomb. The eleven and those with them were in hiding. But the day was far from over.

The news was incredible and most of the key people were struggling with what they were hearing. We may ask why they struggled? Jesus had told

them many times what was going to happen. When Jesus met the two on the road he too asked why. He even told them they were foolish and slow of heart in understanding what God had done. This a key question for us as we begin this journey. Where are we and why are we doing what we are doing? Why are we sometimes so slow and hearing God and believing what he tells us to do?

In this story we have three groups of people. Each of them is struggling with understanding what is happening, why it is happening and how they should respond.

Group one:

The ladies are the least confused. They know what they have seen and heard. They know the Lord has risen. But no one is willing to listen to them. Later this day that would change and no one would doubt what they had seen.

Group two:

The disciples and the others with them are frozen in place. They are unable to move, afraid of the leaders, afraid of the Romans, afraid of the people. They are hiding.

Group three:

Then there are two others. They decide to leave town. They are not members of the inner 11. The threat may not have been as high for them but still they would be somewhat known by their presence and association with Jesus. One wonders how they dealt with the guards at the gates into Jerusalem? Did they sneak out, manage to slip through unobserved or in some way manage to escape being noticed?

Each group represents issues related to obeying the command to go to the world with the gospel. Each of them reflects what must happen in a pastor's life so that people will respond to what he/she says and choose to follow them into the world. Or, they may stay at home and do nothing.

**Group one:** The women are those who are convinced of the truth but have little or no influence in the lives of others. This is a sad commentary on how the church operates at times. They often allow the influence and approval of others to determine if they will follow the vision they have received. They are highly dependent on the approval and support of others in making decisions and doing anything that is different or could be questioned by their peers.

**Group two:** Those cowering in fear, like the disciples, are those who will never make a decision without a sign or major event that everyone

sees. They need this to be sure everyone is convinced of the truth. So many of us are waiting for this sign. We know we are trapped in a debilitating and dangerous environment. So we hide out with those who are like us. We cower in the past and become frozen in place. Even when someone who is a member of our group begins to see, we still don't respond and draw them back into the group. It says Peter saw the empty tomb and began wondering. John saw and was convinced, but in the end they both returned to the group and did nothing. At least nothing more than anyone else was doing. Unwilling to change, unwilling to move, unwilling to truly believe and risk believing.

**Group three:** Now we come to the two who decided to head to Emmaus. We have no information as to why this village and what they had in mind. It could be that this is where they lived. We know the name of one, Cleopas, but not the other. We know they were part of a group that include the 11 and the others with them. They are called disciples, but are not among the eleven. And, we know that they did invite the stranger (Jesus) to dine with them.

They choose to leave. They needed to get away. Why?

They took a risk to leave. It is hard to imagine that anyone associated with Jesus could move about safely. The word was out that the disciples (which could easily be interpreted as any follower of Jesus) had stolen the body. They had supposedly overpowered a Roman guard, defied the Sanhedrin, and disappeared. Think about it. Could anyone associated with Jesus move about freely?

But they did so. Why?

Many reasons can be posited.

- There was not enough space for them
- It was too dangerous to stay in the city, more so than in trying to leave
- They decided that it was over and it was time to return to the life of before

Emmaus is only 7 miles (10 kilometers) away. Still too close to really be safe. If anyone spotted them leaving it would take very little time for some guards to be sent and bring them back. So their journey was not about safety. Also no way to know the size of the location where they were meeting so it is difficult to say that they left because it was too crowded. Remember later in Acts over 100 would be gathered for prayer as they waited for God to move. So it is not likely that their journey is about lack of space.

It may be just this simple. It was time to return to the way things were. They had enjoyed a great time while Jesus was alive. He raised their hopes and now he was gone. It was time to go home and reflect on all that had happened. The truth was that for all the teaching and miracles nothing had really changed. So in the end, they decide to do nothing more and left the city.

This is much like what happens to so many. We read a book, attend a seminar, or some other event that stirs in us the hope that there is more to be done, more to be experienced, that there is the possibility of real change. But, in the end, we return to where we were before and nothing changes.

And that is what would have happened, and almost did, except that is not what the Lord wanted for them.

These two began to reflect on all of the events, reports and the past three years. But it was all in the past and they could not see beyond the moment. And then Jesus arrives and begins to speak to them again.

His opening words are harsh and true (Luke 24:25-26). So often it is our own foolishness, our own inability to trust the word of God, to lean on the power of the Holy Spirit and truth that God has revealed to us, that limits what God can do. So often it is our slowness of heart to believe.

We choose not to believe that God can change us, change those we serve, and change the direction we are going. We become the chain that binds ourselves and those we serve to the past. We become the one who obscures the truth and so blots out any ray of hope that God may kindle in our heart and in the hearts of those around us.

Sometimes, the pastor is bound to the way things have always been done. He is blinded by his concept of what is needed to do God's work. He wants to be a miracle worker, but he only sees in himself a common laborer. He can only think of home and traveling back to the familiar and doing what he has always done.

But it is here on the road that Jesus met these two and began the process of renewal that would change these two, the disciples, and the others with them.

Why these two?

Actually they would not be the only ones to return to familiar ground. Later Peter and the others returned to Galilee and the fishermen went fishing. Sometimes it is necessary to go home. This process can open the

way for review, new revelation, insight, and change. But only if we are willing.

Remember, the conversation between Jesus and the two, could have come to an end. They could have thanked the stranger for an interesting discussion and sent him on his way. Instead they invited him to share a meal. This was more than a casual invitation. It was personal. When they shared their life and opened themselves to the stranger is when their eyes were opened and the true change began.

Following a miracle worker is an easy thing to do. Following a risen Savior requires another level of commitment and risk. Likewise maintaining the status quo is simple. It is easy for the pastor to preach and teach in the church. It is easy to do a little and be satisfied. However, it is when the pastor lets go of his control that he will be able to see his foolishness and slowness of heart and start believing what God can do.

It is interesting to note in this story that Jesus, as the unknown visitor, took control of the dinner. He assumes the position reserved for the head of the house, the eldest person or person of position. He is given the freedom to act. Thus the road to Emmaus, became a chance to encounter Jesus, to begin the process of preparing for the mission of God, and submitting our position to another.

Think about which group you are in.

Are you the one who knows the truth, but feels helpless, unable to act?

Are you the one cowering in fear of hearing the truth, afraid of accepting what it means and dealing with the changes that will be required?

Are you the one trapped in the past, the way you have always lived and served?

There is something for each of us in this journey. For some of us, it will empower us and make us bold enough to stand and declare what we know. For others, it will give us the courage to face our fear and deal with it. For others, it will reveal what binds us to the past and help us to break free.

Wherever you are, whoever you are, and whatever you are doing, the journey has value. Even for those who are already on the way. For there is always benefit in review. It will refresh and renew each one and provide encouragement to the others who are in need of companionship along the way.

Let us choose to recognize our journey. Let us choose to let Jesus reveal himself. Let the journey begin.

## The Journey - Day 03 - The Thomas Syndrome

*John 20:24-25 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."*

Jesus has come back but Thomas was not present to see him. We have no idea why he was not there. Was he out buying food and supplies? Was he hiding somewhere else with another group? Did he decide he needed some fresh air and so went for a walk? If the first and last are true, why didn't Jesus wait for him instead of delaying their critical reunion another week?

Actually, it may have been for a very good reason.

So later that night, or the next day, or sometime after Jesus had left, Thomas returned. For the moment let us assume he returned shortly after Jesus had left. As he started to open the door immediately he was inundated with what had happened. Imagine it as almost an attack on the senses. He couldn't get in the door and the ladies were jabbering about an empty tomb and angels. Mary Magdalene was sobbing, no laughing: no, it's hard to tell which. But she was shouting at him that she had touched the Lord. When he finally got into the room, Peter and John grabbed him and shouted 'the tomb is empty.' Others told him that Jesus was with them in this very room. More were saying how they saw his wounds and others how he even ate some fish to convince them he wasn't a ghost. One grabbed him, another turned him around. Suddenly Thomas' head was spinning.

Thomas began to think they were all crazy. And this was not the first time he had difficulty in grasping information at this level. He had struggled when Jesus declared that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. (John 11:8,15-16) More recently, when Jesus told them he was leaving to prepare a place for them. Thomas did not quite grasp the idea that Jesus was returning to heaven and asked for directions (John 14:5). (Actually, none of them grasped the idea. He was the one who verbalized their confusion.)

Thomas was slow to understand what happened. Slow to commit to what appeared impossible. He was unwilling to see the possibilities that would alter his expectations. He stated, defiantly, that he would only follow if he had a personal experience, and not just any personal experience. He



wanted exactly what everyone else had experienced and even more. He wanted permission, no actually he demanded that he be given more evidence than anyone else had received before he would commit himself to any action, any decision, any sacrifice.

But so many of us are like this. I am. I want my own revelation. I want my own encounter. I want to hear Jesus' words and not just what others say they have heard. I don't trust what others may say, even when it is clear that God has spoken. I see and hear what God is doing in their lives and ministry. But I refuse to see that God could do the same in me if I will listen to what others have to tell me and show me.

Do we dare fast forward for a quick look at the future for Thomas? Yes.

Jesus, on this occasion, complied with Thomas' demand. It was a demand. There was no sense in which this was a simple request. He needed to confirm what had been said but based solely in his own experience. He made that quite clear by the very nature of his declaration. He declared in no uncertain terms that he would not listen to anything they had to say, and it did not matter how many had seen Jesus, he would not believe; he would not follow; he would not risk anything, until his demands were met.

Jesus returned but with some very strong words. First he commanded Thomas, do what you said you would do. Touch me, look at me, deal with your doubt and your lack of faith and in doing so realize what you may have lost by making such demands. Realize again what you may lose each time you let your doubt rule and block your faith in me. It is time for you to get over yourself and deal with your egocentric behavior. You are not more important than anyone else. Your demands do not make your faith stronger, they weaken you. Your hesitancy only places you at greater risk and causes you to suffer needlessly. Your failure to trust your brothers means that those who need you will have to wait because you think your needs are more important than the needs of others. (Could this not be the intent behind Jesus words "you believe because you have seen, blessed are those who believe and have not seen?" Think about it.)

How many of us are like this?

Something great is happening and instead of celebrating and sharing in what God is doing, we begin to act like Thomas. We tell others that we need to wait and be sure it is from God. Why? Because we did not receive the vision, we did not hear the words. We don't like being dependent on what God has said when we are not the ones receiving the message.

Many will say they don't have time for another study. They don't have time to listen to someone else. I know this is true because at various times in my life I have done the same thing. Instead of celebrating what God is doing I become jealous, I discourage others, I prevent others from learning and sharing in the blessing. Maybe not completely but just enough so that I have some control. I want the same as everyone else or more, and that is the issue. We are not interested in what God wants.

And so those who believe, those who obey, those who do not demand to have something no one else has had - they are the ones who will truly be blessed.

Something I have learned is that if I will choose to listen, believe in what others have learned, and decide to move forward, I will receive confirmation in other ways. But this will not come if I stubbornly refuse to hear what others have learned and make use of those lessons as guides for my life as well.

Imagine what our world would be like if Paul, Peter, James, and John, had never written down what they had learned and shared it with us. We would not know how God speaks, have no way to evaluate what He does, and have nothing to compare to in order to be certain the message, direction, and event is from God and not from Satan. Imagine if the great students of the Word, the great preachers, the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us had never shared their experiences, their lessons learned, and their failures and successes. Imagine how poor our lives would be without men like John Wesley, Billy Graham, or Martin Luther.

So as we begin the journey we will have to make this same decision. Will we listen to what God is doing in the lives of others? Or will we be willing to share what God is doing so others will benefit? We need both people on this journey. Those that God speaks to who are willing to share, (like the women, Peter and John, and the others) to tell us what God is doing, what God is saying and more. And those who are willing to trust God and listen to what he is saying to them through others.

Sometimes God chooses to speak through others. Will we chose to listen?

## **The Journey - Day 04 - Gone Fishing**

*John 21:1-3 It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples*

*were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

Do you feel overwhelmed already? That walk to Emmaus involves a lot of review and will increase the work we have to do. The challenge to Thomas further focuses the issues. If we are not careful we will collapse emotionally or go into an avoidance pattern. We will avoid talking about what needs to be done, we will avoid hearing questions about the need to change, we will avoid contact with others because we don't want to face the facts that there is a need for change. So many reasons to run away and hide.

In my culture we have various phrases that people use to tell others they are not available to talk, or meet.

- Out to lunch – I will be gone a short while. I need food and a short rest before I am available to discuss whatever you have on your mind.
- Gone fishing – I am not and will not be available for some time. I need a change, a break and so I have gone away to a remote place where no one will bother me.
- Checked out – I have disconnected from whatever is happening mentally. I no longer want to deal with the issues and have no interest in what is being discussed.
- Not listening – I have made up my mind and have no interest in what others have to say about what I am doing or about what I should do.

Your culture may have similar phrases to describe people who do not want to deal with the truth or listen to what they are being told.

At one level it is not bad to take a mental break. We often need time to evaluate, to get alone with God to pray and meditate, review what we are doing to see if we need to make changes. So getting away can provide a much needed time to be restored, energized and prepared to do what we need to do.

However, it can also be used to escape our responsibilities and avoid listening to what God is telling us and avoid obeying the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Here we have a story of a group of men getting away. They decide to go fishing. This almost sounds like a repeat of the story of Peter's call to follow Jesus (Luke 5:1-7). The difference is that Peter had made that

decision, followed Jesus, ran away from Jesus, and been confronted by Jesus about his denial. It had been a tumultuous time. The trial, the denial, the running, the empty tomb, and the encounter with the risen Jesus. If it were me I would want to get away and have some time to think as well.

Yet this story in John suggests something different.

The disciples fish all night but they catch nothing. So if the goal was to relax it didn't work and instead it became a time of frustration. If I am fishing. It doesn't matter how long I fish. If I catch something worth keeping then the amount of time involved is irrelevant. But if I spend hours trying and catch nothing then all I gain is discouragement and more frustration.

Peter and his group catch nothing.

This is not helpful. They are stressed out and unsure about what to do. They are fisherman and know how to fish, but they get nothing. Emotionally drained, a few fish would give them some confidence in themselves, make them feel good about the decision to leave things behind and try to return to a comfortable point in the past. But they get nothing.

Why do we try to get away? If not to be restored, then why? Often it is in an attempt to return to a point where we had some control of the world around us. A point in time where we were comfortable and others depended on us. A time when we knew what to do and life was predictable. It is an attempt to recover a past that no longer exists, or a perspective that is no longer possible. It is an attempt to avoid, deny what is happening, and convince ourselves that we can evade the consequences of not listening, not dealing with the truth, and not obeying the directions we know we must follow.

Why do I say this about Peter and the group? It is pretty simple. A stranger arrives, tells them to move the net 2-3 meters (the other side of the boat), and when they obey the net is filled with fish. So full they could not lift it into the boat and had to tow it to shore.

There is another aspect of this escape process. It is also about not wanting to change. I leave because I want to do things my way. I want to do it when I want to or when I feel I am ready. I want to do it how I want to do it no matter what happens, even if I fail in the process.

This is very evident here. Peter and the group chose to go back to fishing, to live the way they had always lived. They chose what they would do,

how they would do it, and when. They fished all night. The end result of their activity was nothing, nothing of value.

Then came the stranger and challenged all of this. The directions were simple. All night with no success and he said move the net to the other side of the boat. Let me make something clear about fishing. At least about when I am fishing. I try to catch fish from every side of the boat. I will fish from the front, back, and both sides in an attempt to catch fish. Especially when I am not having any success. So this direction to cast on the other side would not have been well received and would have caused skepticism and more frustration.

Really, the issue was not about where the fish were. As far as they were concerned there were no fish to catch. It didn't matter if they threw the net to front, back or either side or if they moved the boat a bit. There were no fish to be caught. They had been doing all of this. All sides, and multiple locations. They had used all of their knowledge, all of their skill and all of the time available in their attempt to catch fish, to return to their past way of living, to restore control and balance through their efforts. All of this has resulted in nothing, no results.

Now the stranger says move the net to the other side. Its hard to say why they even listened, why they moved the net, but they did. That obedience resulted in an immense catch.

So the question for us as we begin the journey is, will we be open to the lessons we can learn from others? Will we hear the stranger speak? Will we stop running away, trying to escape our need to listen and change and move our net, our life, to the place God has prepared for us?

Each of us needs to think through why we have gone fishing, gone out to lunch or whatever phrase you use to describe your attempt to get away. Are you escaping, avoiding, and evading God's directions for you? Are you unwilling to see what you need to do and so you make excuses and try to live in the past? OR. Are you ready to give up the past, listen to what God has to say and reveal to you, and change what you are doing so you can receive all that God has prepared for you? In doing so not only will you be blessed, but also all of those ready to follow you on the journey.

## The Journey - Day 05 - Sheep

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

We now come to the very tense passage in this journey. A place where none of us wants to be, under the scrutiny of the master shepherd. He is the one who told us the most important evidence of love for the sheep is a willingness to find the lost sheep and to risk one's life caring for the sheep.

Peter is nervous and happy to see the Lord. There is something about to happen and he knows it. Although he was the first to come to the Lord, to bring the fish to be cooked, he knows there are issues to be dealt with. He has had a private meeting and knows he is loved by his Lord. But there is still the matter of his restoration in the eyes of everyone else.

It is time for this wandering sheep (Peter) to become a pastor and be restored to the work he was called to do. Jesus called him to be a fisher of men, not of fish, and not just an ordinary shepherd who can only see the boundaries of the sheepfold. It is time to learn about what it means to be a pastor. To fully understand this we need to compare this encounter with David's words about what it means to be a truly good shepherd; a shepherd who understands the mission (his work) and how to take care of sheep. Actually being a shepherd is much more than just watching. It is about learning how to do for others what Jesus is about to do for him.

Three times Jesus asks the question "do you love me." Each time in a different way. Each time with greater force. It is hard to see this fact until you study the Greek words being used. Each time the question involves deeper and deeper levels of commitment. Three times Peter is commanded to carry out a specific action.

1. Feed my lambs
2. Take care of my sheep
3. Feed my sheep

There are two things to keep in focus.

In every one of these three commands the comment contains the idea that the sheep do not belong to Peter. They belong to the Lord. As pastors and leaders we have no right to claim the sheep (the members of the church or group) as ours. They belong to Jesus. He is the one that saves them. Through his action the Holy Spirit is sent to provide them with key resources and gifts. Through him they will know their Father in heaven.

The pastors and leaders are not the providers or saviors. They are the caregivers.

The second concept is that of progression. Sheep are born, develop, and mature. Each stage requires a different kind of care, a different type of focus, a different level of activity. Lambs need much more care and, as Paul stated, need to be fed on milk, basic truth. As sheep develop they need a more intense level of care, more intense because they are growing and learning much about the world around them. They learn what to do, where to go, and who cares for them. These are the deeper truths about God.

Finally they are adults and are capable of reproducing and being more independent in their activity. They still need a certain level of care, but not that of the others. Here the love is expressed, not by the level of control, but with a confidence that these sheep have learned to hear the master's voice, have learned how to survive in a dangerous world and soon will be ready to be a shepherd themselves. Sheep can become something more than just sheep.

This last idea is a clear break from what we normally think of as the work of a shepherd and the life of sheep. Yet this what Jesus intended for the disciples. He wants them to become much more than just another shepherd watching over their private little flock. He wants them to train others to do this work and help them move on and form their own flock and then repeat the process.

I have been studying in depth the shepherd's psalm (Psalm 23) of David. It is a fascinating study in how to live and how to be a shepherd. Pause a minute to read it before going on. Look at the high points of God's provision:

1. He provides a quiet place to rest and strengthened
2. He provides a place to be refreshed and restored
3. He provides a clear path to follow

We are truly grateful for these provisions. But look at the next sequences of ideas.

1. The path takes me through dangerous places
2. The place of restoration is at a table in front of my enemies
3. The place of peace is in the presence of evil.

David is a warrior. He is not leading his flock of sheep (soldiers) away from danger but into danger. He cares for his them by training them to live as soldiers and be able to defeat the enemy. He does this by

providing all of the above, even as the Lord has provided it for him. Likewise, Peter is being called to do more than just feed sheep.

Peter is warned that the path he will need to follow will be filled with danger (vs 18). Peter tries to sidestep this by commenting on someone else's responsibility (vs 21). That doesn't work and Peter is commanded to follow the master's direction for him and not worry about what others may be doing. In other words, feed the sheep and follow the instruction that Master gives you.

Sheep.

We have always been taught they need to be taken care of by those called to be pastors. We have always thought this meant gathering them up and doing everything for them. Everything but sending them into dangerous places. Everything but helping them to do the very work we are doing.

That is the wrong path. It does not bring us to a place of peace, or rest, or restoration. It just lets us have control. Peter is told clearly that the right path will mean relinquishing control.

Peter was grieved that Jesus had to ask him three times if he loved him. Each time he said that he did. And Jesus basically told him to care for others more than he cared for himself. He told him to make sure the lambs became sheep and the sheep developed into what God wanted.

If we follow David's pattern of caring for the sheep, then we have a great challenge ahead. We must prepare the sheep to enter into the world, attack the enemy and set up house in enemy territory. Therefore, we need to develop a new concept of who the sheep are and how we are to take care of them. This is where the journey will take us. It will change our idea of how we do the work and carry out the mission of God. Remember Jesus said he was sending us like sheep among wolves (Mt 10:16).

Are you ready for yourself and all those you serve to face the Lord and be able to answer His questions? Are you ready to develop your people into much more than sheep? Will you let the Lord teach you to make disciples and not just another generation of dumb sheep? Are your sheep ready to face the wolves?

This is one of the more difficult steps to take on this journey. At least for many. But if we take it, what is impossible for man becomes possible in God.



## The Journey - Day 06 - Ruts

*Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

This passage has been preached on, taught about and discussed over and over. It has become like a rut-filled road. Once you are in it you can only go one way and are stuck in the rut until you arrive at your destination. So why do we need to repeat what we already know? Why go over again the four target groups of missions? Because we constantly assume that we can learn nothing new. Or we assume we already know what it says. But maybe we can escape the rut, escape following the well-worn path. Not for the purpose of deviating from the path but to get alongside of it and take a look at why this path is so important and why we are so unwilling to enter it.

knowing that once we are on the path, stuck in the ruts there is only one way to go. That we will have to respond and will have to accept our responsibility to get everyone involved in the task of reaching people at all levels.

Let us draw on the concept of a pasture to help us visualize this. This is a place where we gain the resources we need to live and function as members of the kingdom of God. So here are what the four areas might look like:

1. Local pasture – This area is well known and the location of all the best grasses, the best waterholes and streams, and the dangers are well marked for us. We don't even have to think about where to go and what to do. In fact, we become so accustomed to this pasture that we begin to create well-worn paths so that we easily return to our favorite places.
2. Neighbor's pasture – We know a lot about this pasture as well. We see others who look like us moving about and acting much like we do. Occasionally we manage to enter this pasture and discover it has everything we have and we realize that there are paths leading to all the good things we need, just like in our pasture.
3. Rough pasture – This pasture is filled with bushes and rocks. Often the water and grass are hard to find and reach. The dangers are greater because of the rocks and bushes. We see that there are paths but following them involves more risk and

potential danger. It is not very attractive and because it is so harsh there is less available that is beneficial.

4. Foreign pasture – We have really only heard about this pasture. They say the grass has a different color, the water tastes different and the paths are hard to see and even harder to follow. Those who have seen them talk about all the wonders and differences, but always seem to be ecstatic to come back home.

An interesting fact is that so many shepherds (pastors) are not very interested in encouraging anyone to leave the local pasture. Why would that be true?

1. Local pasture – It is so easy to keep track of everyone. That means it takes less work to provide what is needed because everything is so accessible. It takes little effort to send their sheep out because everything is well marked and they always know when to come back and how to get back. This means that the job of caring for and protecting them is easy. What threats there are require so little effort to deal with because they are easily seen and understood. Even when something serious occurs it is easy to access our resources. For the most part, everyone (the sheep) is content and easy to please.
2. Neighbor's pasture – This is a nice pasture but if we go there it will only be a burden. It takes more work and we have to provide extra services to go and come back. Since others are already there our presence would just tax the resources and then there would not be enough for everyone; and trying to enter other areas would require so much more time and effort. We also might have to depend on others to take care of us when we have problems. It is a more work than we are used to, moving from here to there and back.
3. Rough pasture – This looks like a lot of work. It is clear that this is not a comfortable place to be. We truly don't know what we are doing and how to deal with the rocks, bushes, and other obstacles. It will take so much effort to teach everyone how to find what they need and interact with those who need, more than us, what is available. It scares us to think about what could happen to those we take there because of the dangers we have heard about.
4. Foreign pasture – There is no way of knowing in advance what this place even looks like. Everything will be different. They say the grass is good and the water is safe but we really wonder if that is true. Some of it may be beautiful, even appealing, but the rules they have make those who have visited a bit

uncomfortable. We have heard of some who died over in that pasture. We are aware that some foreign pastures have problems and there are needs and shortages. How could we hope to cope with those issues, take care of our sheep and still have energy to make a difference?

And so we don't want to get in the ruts because of where they will take us. Even following alongside them makes us nervous and fearful we may somehow slip into one and have to follow it wherever it takes us.

Now let us consider why we behave this way.

First we need to consider that in all of these pastures there is one thing that they lack and that we have an abundance of, fertilizer. Not just any fertilizer, but one guaranteed to make any grass grow better and sweeter. One that won't pollute the water and will even restore those who are sick to health. Some call it a miracle, and in a way it is, because we never run out and we have a personal relationship with the supplier.

Now back to why we are so unwilling to go. So unwilling to risk the ruts.

1. Comfortable – We are unwilling to get out of our comfort zone. We are happy with the paths we have made locally and are just too lazy to attempt anything new or that might risk us not having what we are used to having.
2. Isolated – The more comfortable a person is the more isolated he becomes. The more isolated he becomes the more difficult it is to go anywhere no matter how close it appears or how easy it would be to go. This isolation limits what can be seen and what we believe is possible.
3. Nervous – The more isolated we are the more nervous we become about anything that is different or unusual. This makes us afraid, not because there is something to truly fear, but because we become afraid there may be something that could harm us. Something that could destroy or rob us of what we have.
4. Selfish – We can only think about protecting what we think is ours. It doesn't matter if we really do own it. But because it is part of our world it becomes ours and we have no desire to share it. Nor is anything that anybody else has, sufficient to provide what we have become accustomed to having. We have ours they have theirs and in truth they don't need or want what we have so why go to all that trouble. We don't have the time for all that is involved in letting go of what we want to care about what others need.

Yes, one of the biggest dangers is getting caught in ruts. But the truth is that the mission of God is not the rut. What we are doing is the rut and we are already trapped. The mission means escaping the rut and finding the paths God has prepared for us.

It is so easy to fall into ruts in ministry and suddenly we are no longer doing missions. We are only doing what is routine and comfortable. We lose the urgency to reach anyone, even those in our neighborhood. Can you identify your ruts and how they are limiting your ability to be a witness? Can you see how you have let yourself become trapped and are unwilling to do the work needed to escape the rut and begin following God's paths to the world no matter where they are? Be careful, because if you don't pull yourselves out God may find someone else to receive the blessings he has prepared for those who follow his paths.

## **The Journey - Day 07 - Authorized Activity**

*Mt 28:18-19 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

Pastors, it is time to look into what we are authorized to do. What are the key activities that Jesus mandated for every pastor and leader? Telling us to take care of the lambs, care for the sheep as they develop, and then make sure they are fed sounds great. But what does that mean? How does that relate to being a pastor and carrying out the mission of God?

To do this means reviewing of all the teaching and lessons that are available to us. That is what this journey is all about. Reviewing and studying what happened in the lives of those who received the command to go to all of the world. And, for me, the best place to begin is with another passage that is well-known to us and has been the source of many sermons on missions and ministry.

The passage starts with a declaration about authority, lists four approved activities, and finishes with a promise.

The authority statement is pretty straightforward. At least it should be. Nothing in heaven and earth can supersede the authority and direction of the risen Lord. Nothing in our life (a topic that will be covered more extensively later), nothing in this world, nothing in any organization has priority over what the Lord tells us to do.

But how often do we let other authorities interfere with the direct and clear commands of the Lord? How often do we let our plans, our lives,

take precedence over what we are really supposed to do? Keep these questions in mind as we look at approved activity.

But let us look at it from a different perspective, from the activities that we have not been directly authorized to do. You may not like what I am about to say.

WE are not given the authority to:

1. Start a children's ministry and keep children busy and happy.
2. Start a youth ministry to keep them protected from the world and safe from unhealthy influences.
3. Start a women's ministry so they can get together and chat and encourage one another as women.
4. Start a men's ministry so that the guys can hang out and do guy stuff.
5. Start a workout program so that everyone can be fit and lose weight.
6. Start a shelter so people can have a warm place to sleep and a hot meal.

Have I upset you yet?

We do not have the authority to:

1. Provide food and clothing for the poor so they can live a better life.
2. Provide counsel for those in difficult times so they can learn to overcome their troubles.
3. Provide medical care for those in need so they can recover their health.
4. Provide supplies for crucial activities in life so that people can achieve more.

This could go on and on. Many will say that there is nothing wrong with these activities. And, in the sense of doing good according to the world's concept of good, then they would be correct. But according to Matthew 28:19-20 not one of these is listed as authorized activity. Yet almost every church is involved in programs and services like those above and more.

So, is it possible for each of them to become authorized? Yes, it is. As we look at the four authorized activities we will see how to incorporate our church programs into those authorized by Jesus.

1. Go – This looks like the simplest activity but in a real sense it is the key to everything else. Unfortunately, so many have altered

it to sound more like “get them to come.” But according to Matthew 28, the first key to any activity or program is to be sure that it makes it possible for us to go. For me the idea of advertising a church on a billboard or newspaper is a bit negative. People should not be expected to come because of our great advertisement, our great program, our incredible leadership team. They should be coming because we went to them, because they had personal contact with a member of the kingdom of God. Any program or activity that restricts or eliminates the need for people to go to others is unacceptable.

Think about what would happen to the church, if instead of waiting for an announcement from the pastor or leader, each person received a personal invitation. And what would happen if every program was based on personal invitations?

We need to develop programs and ministries based on our going to others to invite them to come.

2. Disciple – This step is rarely included in the planning of most programs and activities. We do not consider that everything we do, every program that we start should be based on discipling those who are involved and preparing for the discipleship of all who come. Too often discipleship is restricted to the select few. The rest must depend on what scraps they can gain from a sermon once a week or a Sunday School lesson which is all too often poorly prepared. Think about those cell groups everyone is so excited about. If we are honest, their key function may be to provide fellowship, not discipleship; a place to make people feel like they belong. Any program that fails in making disciples is not authorized.
3. Baptize – This takes the previous idea one step further. Our stated goal should always be bringing people to the place where they publicly declare they are followers of Christ and are ready to serve wherever he leads. Again, very few programs have this as a key focus for what they are doing. Here are a few examples of some that do: jail ministry, nursing home ministry, programs that send people out to tell those in need of God’s love. But, do we expect baptism as the next step in serving, as the event that marks the beginning of a life of service? Or is it just a means of counting who is with us and who is not? A harsh question, but in Jesus’ time a decision to be baptized was a serious event. It represented a serious break with the past and a clear declaration

that the person was a disciple (not another follower); a person committed to carrying out the next authorized activity.

4. Teach – At this point the words of Jesus are pretty clear. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded them. And everything Jesus commanded was summed up in his final version of the two commandments. Love God with every fiber of your being and love others as I have loved you. (John 13:34) (This is a big step beyond simply loving your neighbor as you love yourself). If the programs we start do not make this their priority then it is not authorized. If what we provide for others does not reveal God's love to them, then it is not authorized.

Bottom line, if no one finds Jesus and is saved then there is something wrong with the program and activity. Every authorized program sends people so others can be saved and make it possible to disciple them when they respond. It leads to a committed sanctified life and then teaches them how to repeat the cycle.

Finally, then we have Jesus' promise. If we link it all together it becomes powerful. I have the authority, here is the activity, and here is my promise. I will be with you in all of this until we are reunited in eternity.

So one more time in outline form. Authorized activity does the following

- Gives all the world the gospel by sending the people to them to the lost.
- Disciples those who respond in how to follow Christ.
- Guides these disciples in making a commitment to serve, to live a life dedicated to Christ.
- Teaches them all that Christ has commanded so that the cycle can be repeated.

Pastor, look at your life and ministry. Are you involved in authorized activity? Does your preaching and ministry follow the pattern set up for us by Christ? Does it take you and your people into the world to proclaim the gospel? Does it challenge people to be disciplined and committed to serving? Does it give them the tools they need to understand all of this and ready to do the same?

All of the activities mentioned above may not be listed in this passage. But they can be authorized if they indeed are based on the four authorized activities.

## The Journey - Day 08 - Accidental Insurance

*Acts 14:23-24 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

How close are you to death or permanent disability?

Or, how certain are you that if you were sick or disabled that God would immediately heal you so you could continue caring for the flock or ministry to which you have been assigned?

Are these uncomfortable questions? If they are, why do they make you feel uncomfortable?

This may seem like a very strange way to begin a study based on the passage above. It is based on the events of the first missionary journey of Saul and Barnabas. As they left Antioch I doubt they had a clear idea of what lay ahead. They may have wondered about how they would be able to feed themselves and find housing. They may have wondered about how they would be received. I am not sure they had clear idea of the type of opposition and danger they would encounter. Saul had been attacked before but that was by those that felt he had betrayed them and saw him as a traitor. It didn't take long and they began to encounter not just opposition but outright persecution and threats against their lives. This would impact how they proceeded and what would be done to ensure that the results of their ministry endured. To get a better idea of what was happening lets us review briefly the history that leads up to this comment. (Acts 13-14).

1. Paphos – They are opposed by Elymas, a sorcerer. It took a miracle to avoid a dangerous situation
2. Perga and Pamphylia– We have no idea what happened but it caused John Mark to abandon the group and go home.
3. Psidian Antioch -They had so much success the leading Jews became jealous and stirred up so much persecution that Saul and Barnabas were expelled from the region.
4. Iconium – God blessed the work but a group of Gentiles and Jews planned to mistreat Paul and Barnabas and stone them if necessary (a deadly form of persecution).
5. Lystra – God heals a man and the people think Paul and Barnabas are gods. In the midst of correcting this error some outsiders arrive and convince the group to stone Paul. He is left for dead. Another miracle - Paul gets up and walks back into town.



6. Derbe – One of the few places where Paul and Barnabas are not attacked. Here Paul declares that we must go through hardships to enter the kingdom of heaven.

When Saul (soon to be called Paul) and Barnabas had left on the first ever missionary trek they had no clue what to expect or what they were going to do. But they went in great faith, depending on God for their resources they obeyed the command to go. And, according to Paul's own reflection later, with dangers all around (2 Co 11:26). Now they decide it is time to return home. At this point it would have been easy to head directly home. Instead they see the need to carry out one more task and so choose to retrace their steps. They visit every place and continue the teaching process and they add one more aspect to their ministry.

During their first visits it is recorded that in each place the people believed and in many cases they become disciples.

1. Psidian Antioch – And the disciples were filled with joy (13:52)
2. Iconium – the disciples had gathered around him (14:20)
3. Derbe – won a large number of disciples (14:21)
4. Return trip – strengthening the disciples and encouraging them (14:22)

Now as they returned to each place they decided to appoint elders. As they did this, they laid hands on them, prayed for them, and committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust. They provided for the continued growth of the church with or without them.

At this point we need to go back to the first comment of this study. How close are you to death or permanent disability? It is a valid question. One we must consider carefully even as did Paul and Barnabas. They had, in a sense, run through a gauntlet, and survived, at times barely, and only because God had more for them to do. They quickly realized that they would not be able to provide what the people needed for several reasons.

1. At any moment they could be forced to leave or be killed.
2. They were not residents and so a time would come for them to move on or return to where they had come from.
3. Staying would not make it possible to do all that God had called them to do.

So, are you ready to leave? Actually, is your church ready for you to leave, or have you suddenly removed? If so, do they know enough about God's mission to carry on the work without you? Do you have a clear

plan so that the work does not break down because you leave or your life suddenly comes to an end?

When we are truly carrying out the mission of God we must keep in focus the need to appoint people who can continue the work when we are gone. We need to focus their eyes on looking to God and not us. We cannot protect them, heal them, or be with them forever. Only God can do that. But we can make sure there will always be leaders prepared to continue caring for the church and leading them in the mission.

Consider this sad fact. So many times when a pastor leaves a church, the church struggles. They began to lose ground, lose focus, and the ministry suffers. It is rare to see a church grow when a pastor has left, or is suddenly taken from them because of death or illness. Why is that?

Could your church continue the mission of God without you? Should they be able to do the work without you? Do you trust your members enough to train them and put them in charge?

Remember that the final point of the activities authorized by Jesus in Matthew 28 is teaching them everything that he has commanded. That means learning to depend on Jesus and the pastor. Why did the church survive and grow after Paul and Barnabas left? Could your church do the same?

## **The Journey - Day 09 - The Draft**

*Mk 3:13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.*

This was not Day One of the ministry of Jesus. Nor was it Day One after the baptism, Or Day One after the temptation. Or even Day One after Jesus called Peter and others to follow him. It was not Day One.

Why? Because even when Jesus calls Peter and some of the others it is after he has already spent time teaching a crowd and performing miracles. Jesus has been quite active. Here is a quick review of some of what happened in the weeks maybe months before this day.

1. Jesus drives an evil spirit out of a man (1:25)
2. He heals Simon's mother and others (1:31-33)
3. He heals a leper (1:40)
4. He heals the paralytic (2:1ff)
5. He heals a man with a shriveled hand (3:5)

Matthew suggests that the selection of the disciples occurred after the sermon on the mount (Mt 10:1 – the selection of the 12 comes after the sermon which is in chapter 6-8). Also, in Matthew’s account, the selection of the 12 comes after he tells his disciples (more than the 12, maybe the 72) that the harvest is great and they should pray that God will send more workers (9:37-38). Then we have the reference to the calling of the 12 and that they were authorized to drive out evil spirits and heal those that were sick.

Luke lists a number of activities and teaching events, much like those in Mark. Luke has the selection before the Beatitudes. But, in every one of these three gospels the final selection of the twelve comes only after a period of teaching and observing. Jesus is not in a hurry to select his inner group. He spends the first period of his ministry scouting out those who are following him.

We know there were four groups of people, or five, if you include the women who followed the group and provided for them (Mark 14:41).

1. We have the general group called disciples. (Mark 2:15), “for there were many that followed him.”
2. There were the 72 that he called and sent out (Luke 10:1).
3. Then there were the twelve
4. Finally the inner three of Peter, James, John.

From the day Jesus began to teach and perform miracles he accumulated disciples. He used this time, during those early days of ministry, to review them, observe them, question them, and test them. He studied them up close and at a distance. He acted almost like a talent scout, looking for key indicators that this person would be the next great player in a sport or in some key field of activity. In this case he was looking for the ones who would go the distance and become the future leaders of a new movement, which became the church of Jesus Christ.

So what was he looking for?

1. Those who were ready – Ready for the teaching. Ready for the attention. Ready for the work.
2. Those who were willing – Willing to pay the price. Willing to obey the leader. Willing to serve others. Willing to lead when it was time.
3. Those who were committed – Nothing else was more important. They would leave everything behind. Following and obeying the master would be their only goal.

I suppose we could add other items but when we look at this very interesting and unique group many of the normal guides don't seem to apply. Things like:

1. Key talent
2. Proven leader
3. Great potential
4. Awesome personal traits and qualities
5. Achievements and dreams

None of our guidelines matter as Jesus' list of requirements and when we review those he selected, there seems to be some discrepancies, at least on the surface. In the group of those chosen we have a thief, common fishermen, sceptics, two people that are enemies of each other and several unknowns. They wouldn't have looked very promising in light of the work they would be called to do. Even more so when we look at their personality traits. Yet...Jesus had done his homework, scrutinized all of those following him and chosen these 12 for another level of training and trust. Then, from within them, he chose three more who would hold a special place in the history of the church. They don't know it but they had been part of the draft and were the first round picks.

So pastor what about you? Have you begun to organize this year's draft to prepare workers for greater service in the kingdom of God? Are you watching for people that God is gifting and marking for special service? Do you have an idea of what to be looking for in their lives?

As you recall from the last study, you have the responsibility to be sure the mission continues after you leave (or die). Are you actively watching for those who will be able to do that work?

Each day you work with the people of the church you should be watching them to see how they respond, what they are interested in, and if they are committed to learning and applying God's word. Do you know why they are there? Are they like many who come when it is exciting and there is something to be gained? Or are they there because they want to serve and to learn?

Scouting for these people is a lot of work. It is so much more than just looking at what others are doing. Good scouting goes much further and learns about the person, their life, their loves, and their weaknesses. A good scout can tell you everything there is about a person they want to recommend. Are you a good scout?

Scouting requires constant observation. Once, twice, three times is not enough. You must be continually observing. Continually finding avenues

to make contact with them. Constantly attempting to see who they are in more than one setting, or in one frame of reference.

It is like a job interview. There is the application process, then there are the references, then there is the first interview and a second interview. Then there is the trial period. For school teachers there is all of that and much more. If you are good enough you can reach the point of receiving tenure. You have a worker approved and qualified by all the standards established by the governing board.

So are you preparing for your draft? The mission depends on each pastor to keep this in focus and select people for in-depth training, greater service, and finally taking over and doing the work without us.

So what does your draft look like this year? This will depend on your commitment to the mission and forming the best team to carry out the mission. So let the draft begin. The journey is always easier when it is shared.

## **The Journey - Day 10 - The watchman**

*Eze 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel*

*1Jn 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard*

What is the job of a watchman?

God called Ezekiel to be a watchman. He was to warn the people of danger. This job assignment came with a key responsibility. If he proclaimed the message God gave him then he was safe from judgment and able to enjoy any blessing God had for the obedient. It did not matter how the people responded. If he did not speak then he would be judged for not warning the people and would experience all of their suffering as well.

How does this relate to this passage in the first letter of John? The clear connection is that John is acting like a watchman: a person called to provide critical information to the people. In this case it is not a warning but a potential blessing. That part is different than Ezekiel's role. What is the same is the responsibility. If John proclaims the message then he will be blessed and the people will receive critical information. If he does not proclaim the message given then he will be judged, the people will not have information critical to their salvation, and he will be impacted by what happens to them.

So what does it mean to be a watchman? What does a watchman really do?

Let us consider two examples:

1. A ship's lookout – This person has several responsibilities. In the days before radar and sonar he was responsible to keep an eye out for several key dangers. These include the danger of reefs and shallow waters, the dangers of an oncoming storm, and the danger of the approach of an enemy vessel. The watchman probably also watched for changes in the wind and current to make sure they were traveling at the best speed possible. (Watching the clouds, movement of waves, and activity of birds.) He could also be responsible to search for critical items that the crew would need. Watching for schools of fish (remember these were long journeys in the day of the sailing ship and fresh food would be welcome) and watching for land. The sight of land represented a couple of things, arrival at their destination, the possibility of restocking key supplies for the ship, a chance to get off the ship and take a break.
2. The watchman of a city gate – This location provided many opportunities for observation and information gathering. Yes the watchmen were expected to keep an eye to the horizon to watch for the approach of a potential enemy and to warn of coming dangers related to weather. (now many places have sirens for such things) But they could also learn much about the world by listening to the comments of the people entering the cities and by the nature of the goods being brought for trade and commerce. They could be a source of information to the people, as well, about the day's events and what the people may be expected to do. A good watchman would be able to keep his leaders informed about the demeanor and attitude of the people towards them and keep the people informed about what the leaders were doing.

A good watchman both provided protection against danger and provided information for the well-being of the people. Such a person was not always put in a high place or prominent location. A watchman's role was not just about watching, it was also about listening and then communicating what they were seeing, hearing, and feeling. A lookout can see what is happening, hear many things and can feel changes in the air and environment. Then he translates that information to both protect and benefit those around them.

A message from a watchman may contain both warning and blessing. It will also contain useful information and direction.

Ezekiel lived in a difficult time. The people were not listening to God. God was greatly disappointed in many of the watchmen that were supposed to care for the people and so selected Ezekiel to try one more time to speak the warning and the blessing. While there was danger outside, the real danger had to do with their relationship with God. While there were blessings in the world, the real blessing had to do with restoring relationships with God.

John also lived in a difficult time. So many had never heard anything about God or about his love. There was an incredible need for the watchman to come down from the tower, the wall at the gate, or wherever he was positioned to share information critical to the lives of everyone he could reach. The danger was clear. The people were doomed because of sin. In this case not just the people of Israel, but everyone in the whole world. The warning that needed to be proclaimed was simple and clear. The solution was equally clear and was based on what the watchman had seen, heard, and touched.

For Ezekiel the goal was for Israel to listen and return to God. For John, the goal was that everyone would listen and return to God. Even more, make them part of a fellowship that could pass the message on to others. A good watchman makes it possible for the leaders and people to make wise choices that will protect them and others from the dangers that are all around them. He also makes it possible for all to enjoy the blessings and benefits that come from making the right decisions. This meant receiving the correct information in a timely manner.

So the question is, what kind of watchman are you? Do you know what is happening around you? Do you know the danger the people are facing? Do you understand the message of hope and salvation they need to hear? Even more importantly, are you actively proclaiming that message?

Good information tells us where we are, what is happening, and most important, how to respond. Is your message making it possible for people to respond? Do you have the information they need to become watchmen for their families, friends, and others who are in danger? It will save them from destruction and open the door to share in fellowship with God.

Are you serving as a true watchman for God?

## The Journey - Day 11 - The next generation

*John 17:20 I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,*

In Jesus' prayer in the garden he covers a number of issues. He reviews his life and ministry and reveals that he had been doing exactly what the Father sent him to do. He talks about the disciples and prays for them. Then he leaps forward in time to this phrase. He prays for those who will believe because of the message they will proclaim.

First let us briefly consider who is doing the proclaiming of the message. Two possibilities exist. It could be just the 11 who are in the inner group or a much larger group of people. Most of the time we limit it to the inner 11. It seems reasonable. They are the ones who receive the most attention and preparation. They are the ones present in the upper room and they are the ones who follow him to the garden. It only makes sense.

But, there are so many references that also suggest it could be a much larger group. While there was the inner group, we are aware that there were many other people present. We always hear about a group of ladies and we are given the names of many (Luke 24:10). There were the 72 (Luke 10:1) who were sent out as well as a larger body of disciples. After Jesus resurrection we are told that others were hiding with the 11 (Luke 24:33). Paul shares that over 500 were present to listen to Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:6) and possibly were present when he ascended. In the room where they gathered to pray before Pentecost there could have been as many as 120 (Acts 1:15). This seems to me to better represent Jesus' intent. He wanted to share the truth not restrict it.

Second we need to look at what he had in mind when he prayed for those that would believe because of their testimony, their lives.

- Vs 20 - that all of them would be one
- Vs 21 – that his unity would convince people that God sent Jesus
- Vs 22 – that they would share in the glory that Jesus had received
- Vs 23 – that they would be able to reveal God's love, the reason for Jesus coming
- Vs 24 – that they would make it possible for others to be with Jesus in heaven
- Vs 25-6 – that they would reveal God to those who don't know



The goal of unit is repeated over and over in each verse. It appears to be the key goal, that all would be one in God. That everyone, those proclaiming the message and those responding, would share together in all the blessing together.

This means the mission is not just gathering people together but uniting them in God. Further it is about making that possible for those who have not heard, have not known about God or His love (vs 25). We are called, mandated and sent to proclaim this truth both to those who have heard and know about God, and to those who have never heard or known there is such a God.

So here is what this looks like. Jesus, who was sent by God, had a key task to carry out. He was to reveal God to the world in such a way that people would believe; and not just believe but be restored to unity with God. Part of this process was to train the next group so that they would carry the message to others – to those who had heard some of the truth and to those who had no idea and to those who had no knowledge of the one true God.

Why do I say this? When the Jews were scattered they carried their belief in God with them. Many gathered around them because of the truth of that belief. They knew about God but needed to hear the gospel. This is true today. Many know there is a God but do not know the rest of the truth. Besides this, there are always those who have not idea that there is one supreme God. They need to know the truth as well, and be given the chance to believe and be united with God.

How are we to continue the work and make it possible for those who need to hear, the ability to hear, respond, and become one with God?

Let us look back at a few key points from the prayer:

- Vs 4 – Complete the work. We know the assignment. Go and preach, disciple, baptize and teach.
- Vs 6 – Reveal God. Reveal who He is, what He has done and most importantly His love, by our lives and actions.
- Vs 8 – Teach others what to do. This was a focus of Jesus' life. It must be our focus as well and not just the truths we feel like teaching but all of them.
- Vs 11 – Reveal the source of our security. This life is not about escaping pain and suffering. It is about overcoming them. It is about the security of our soul and the rescuing of others.
- Vs 13 – Experiencing the joy of God's presence. This joy is made complete when we proclaim the message.

- Vs 18 – Send them. Jesus was sent by God and he sent those he trained. To proclaim this message we need to do the same; train others and send them.

Which brings us back to Jesus' prayer for those who proclaim and for those who will believe because of them.

Even before Jesus died he was thinking about the next generation of those who would believe. He prayed for those who would be responsible for that to happen and prayed that the cycle would be repeated. He prayed for the unity of those going and that those who heard and believed would experience that same unity and same desire to go to the next group.

So what does your prayer life and ministry look like today? Is there a next generation who are uniting around the principles and ideas drawn from the Lord's prayer? How would you evaluate your performance in carrying out the task as defined by Jesus? How would another person evaluate your performance? Have you actually gathered the first group? Is there evidence that the cycle is being repeated?

In your prayers today, try to identify the group that you are or need to be preparing and begin praying for two things:

1. Pray that you will learn to carry out the task given to you and that you will learn to depend on God for the resources needed to do so.
2. Pray for the lives of those you have been given to prepare. Use Jesus' prayer as a pattern of the way you need to pray for them.

May there be a growing cloud of witnesses that will be the evidence that you have completed the task given to you. People who are joining you on the Journey.

## **The Journey - Day 12 - Next, Next Generation**

*2 Ti 2:2 entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

How do you get from one place to another? The answer, one step at a time. How did we get from the time of the disciples to today? One generation at a time. How will we get to the return of Jesus? One step at a time and one generation at a time.

This comment of Paul's to Timothy is about each pastor answering these simple questions and making it possible for the church to continue its mission until the second coming of Jesus. Learn everything you can from those who came before you, and then pass it on to those who will follow you. Do it so that everything you have learned will be taught clearly and confidently to the second generation. So for Paul that was the next, next generation. (For Paul this was Timothy and those he would teach.) (For Timothy those he would teach who could teach the others.)

In chapter 1 of 2 Timothy, Paul covers a few things that will help us keep this part of the mission in focus.

Vs 4 - Be sure you are a joy to those who have gone before. You are the fruit of their labor, so be the best fruit you can be.

Vs 6 – Keep your focus on the gift and ministry God has given you. Others saw what God was doing in your life, committed themselves to believe in you and you need to keep that in focus.

Vs 7-8 – Don't be timid and don't be ashamed of your relationship with God and your relationship with other Christians. You are a Christian because of what God has done through them and because they obeyed his command to tell you.

Vs 13 – Never set aside the sound teaching you have received. Sound teaching is hard work but always leads people to God and helps them to repeat the process. Straying from this teaching may make you popular but it yields false results.

Vs 14 – Guard diligently what you have received. The world is full of thieves and liars who would love nothing more than to ruin you and deceive others for personal gain. Their goal is clear, ruin the truth and prevent anyone from going to heaven. Remember you have a powerful helper on your side, the Holy Spirit.

Each of these represents a critical aspect of our preparation and our ability to make it possible for the next generation to proclaim the gospel the way it was meant to be proclaimed, in the name of God, and with Jesus as the only way to salvation. When we keep our focus on God we will give the correct training. When we are unashamed of our relationship, then we will lead others to the only source of salvation. When our teaching is sound, then there will be a solid foundation on which to build. When diligent in our care for what we have received and of those we are teaching, then we open the door for the next, next generation.

Now that we have looked at some of the issues that makes us qualified to train others, let us consider what we need to look for in those who we are to train. We need to understand who the reliable people are that we need to teach. Paul gives us three examples and qualities that we need to develop in our lives and to search for in the lives of those we prepare to carry the mission of God to the ends of the earth.

1. Soldier
2. Athlete
3. Farmer

At first glance one wonders what these three have in common. On the surface there is one key item. They all must devote all of their time and energy to who they are and what they do if they are to succeed. Each of them has learned to endure. The reasons for such endurance are different but in each case without endurance they would not succeed in their chosen occupation.

Beyond that each of them represents a critical characteristic we need to study, apply to our lives and seek out in the lives of those we are to teach, train, empower for serving in the kingdom of God and in extending this kingdom to others, the next generation.

Soldier – He is undistracted by the concerns of the world. He has only one focus, obeying his commanding officer. Family, friends, personal desires are all secondary to this one all-consuming concern. Before he gives anything, (time, resources, life) to anyone else he must fulfill all the orders and obligations he has been given by his commander. Does this mean he has no time for himself? No. But, it must not hinder his ability to carry out his primary duty. This is not a burden to others, in fact, it is an honor to have such a person in the family, as a friend, or as part of a group. There is never any question about a soldier's loyalty. A soldier protects and provides security for the next generation.

Athlete – He clearly understands the cost involved in reaching a goal. He knows the rules that guide his activity and he knows exactly how to organize his life to reach the goal. An excellent athlete leads a life that is balanced. A key rule of his preparation is about maintaining a healthy life, physically, mentally and emotionally. Failure in any of these areas will result in failing to gain the prize and may even result in a failure to complete the race. A good athlete attracts others and inspires others. He provides a standard for himself and the next generation.

Farmer – He knows the benefit of his labor both for himself and for others. When the work is done right he will receive the sustenance he

needs and also be able to provide for others. He knows how much to produce, how to store what is produced and the proper way to make it available to others. The farmer knows how to wisely use his resources so that both he and those he provides for have what is needed and that there is enough for the next cycle, the next generation.

The questions are pretty clear:

1. What are you doing with the preparation you have received?
2. What are you doing to seek out those to prepare for the next generation?
3. What are you doing to help them do the best job they can in that preparation?
4. What are you doing to be sure the next, next generation receives the message of God?

## The Journey - Day 13 - Rights

*1 Co 9:15 But I have not used any of these rights*

We all want to know what our rights and responsibilities are in every aspect of our life. And we believe that we have rights. We have rights as members of our family, our community, our culture, our country and as a member of the human race. Many fights have been started over the concept of personal rights, sovereign rights, and the attempt to take away those rights.

Each day we find ourselves dealing with a mixture of the various levels of rights. We must make decisions of which set of rights will have control in a complex array of changing situations, from our public life to our private life. This has to be done within a constantly shifting image of people and situations. The decisions relate to which set of rights we place in control in each setting. Even when we think the decision process is simple, it is not.

For example when you are alone you must decide what activities take priority. Even personal time is impacted by everything that is happening around you. Do you need to spend the time thinking about responsibilities for your family, your work, your next encounter with various people or what is happening in the society around you? Do you really have the right to do only what you want to do, without considering the rights of others and your responsibility to them?

Paul knew that he had rights and those needed to be carefully thought through and balanced with a key responsibility; that of proclaiming the gospel. But not just proclaiming it but doing it in a way that would not trigger a conflict over issues that were irrelevant, such as group rights or political and religious structures that decide their member's rights.

We, too, must make the same decision as Paul. This decision can be made in one of two ways. It could be made under pressure or submission. We can choose to set aside our rights, but not willingly. This happens over and over and usually makes for unhappy and uncomfortable relations. For example, children submit but you can see the rebellion simmering below the surface. Spouses submit but begin planning their revenge. Students do their work but complain to everyone about how unfair it is. People follow the rules but plan acts of disobedience. We do what we are expected to do but unwillingness creates a stressful environment.

On the other hand, we can choose to set aside our rights willingly because we know it is right to do so and we clearly see the benefits for all involved in the process. My actions, then, become an encouragement to others. They are more cooperative and more likely to respond positively. Those in authority will experience a reduction in the stress of supervising the rules and regulations. Willingly setting aside one set of rights for the benefit of others can open many doors and avenues for future relations and future interaction. It creates less barriers and may give us an opportunity to share why we have made this choice. And so on.

Giving up one's rights for the sake of others is a critical decision and we need to know clearly why we are doing so and what is involved in yielding our rights to the control of others. As pastors there is really only one reason to consider such a decision. It is to make it possible for others to find a relationship with God or to develop that relationship without unnecessary distraction from irrelevant structures and systems that define rights, not from the perspective of God, but from that of man.

So what was Paul willing to give up so that others could know God and develop in that relationship?

Financial rights – Paul gave up any rights to compensation for the work he was doing. If he received anything it wasn't because he charged a fee for his services but because people were willing to help him continue to preach and teach.

Personal rights – He would submit himself to serving others. Their needs, their joys, their sorrows, their hopes took precedence over his. But this was not a burden for Paul. He saw this as the greatest way for him to deal

with the struggles in his life and experience the greatest possible joy and hope available to a person.

Legal political rights – These meant nothing to Paul if they prevented him from communicating the gospel. The choice to submit or set these aside depended on whether they hindered the proclamation of the gospel or provided him with greater freedom to do so. He would submit when it was in the best interest of sharing God’s truth and defy the authorities when they sought to restrict the truth.

Cultural rights – As long as it didn’t bring him into conflict with God’s word, Paul adapted his way of living to become part of any group that he had contact with. He sought to teach everyone that the gospel is so much more than the clothes you wear, the food you eat, and style of life you live.

Pastor, do you know your rights? Do you know your responsibilities? When there is a conflict between what you think your rights are and how they affect your ability to communicate the gospel, how do you decide what to do? Does the decision make you joyful or resentful?

Hebrew 12:2 tells us that Jesus willingly suffered because of the joy he saw would be the result of his actions. Paul tells us in 1 Co 9:22 that he willingly gave up his rights so that some might be saved and that he would share in the blessings that came as a result of the gospel changing the lives of those who were saved.

Do you see the value in submitting your rights to others so that others will clearly hear the gospel?

## **The Journey - Day 14 - Triathlon**

*Ecc 9:11 The race is not to the swift*

Paul uses several ideas to describe the work of missions and ministry. One of the most common is the use of a race to describe what is involved in successfully carrying out the work.

Before we go too far into his thoughts it would be good to consider the different kinds of races and what might be involved. Each has a different focus, and the preparation for each is a bit different, but the one thing that is the same is the need for focused and continuous preparation.

1. **Sprint** – This is a term used to describe all the distances that are less than a mile in length. They last a very short time and the

racer exerts himself to the limits of his strength for the entire distance. The goal is give it all in a burst of energy. The start is critical in this process. After that, it is all about pushing as hard as one can to the finish. A lot of preparation for a brief flurry of activity. It is a bit like a small meteor that burns briefly and then disappears. The track and the environment are always the same, Flat and unobstructed.

2. Middle distance – This is everything between the sprint and the marathon. Starting is not critical. There is always time to recover and make up lost momentum. This race is more about strategy, about being in the right place so that a final burst of energy will launch a person past the opposition at the critical moment. As with the sprint, the middle distance race is carried out on a flat and unobstructed course.
3. Marathon – This is the best known of the long-distance races. The courses are never the same. The environments always differ. The focus is not on the start and rarely on the finish. It is about setting a pace and maintaining the correct use of energy and resources in order to complete the race. Another feature is the need to have people in place to provide water and food at critical points so that the runner can reach the finish. Careful planning, an understanding of the course, and dealing with the climate are critical to this race.
4. Triathlon – This race involves multiple levels of performance and multiple environments. It also involves the use of different types of equipment to complete the course. It involves swimming, bicycling, and running. The usual distance is over 160 km (120 miles) and can take over 7 hours for the best competitors to complete.

Why have I included all of the above information. The reason is quite simple. Each type of race requires a different kind of preparation. Making the wrong decision about your preparation will guarantee a less than “first place” finish. In some cases it may mean not even completing the race.

Some might think that we, as pastors, must decide what kind of race we are running. No, that is not correct. We are not the ones who chooses the type of race. The mission we are called to do will define the nature of the race. So we need help in clarifying what our race is. This will help us deal with proper preparation and understanding in how to run. To do this we need to review Paul’s comments about the race and what we need to do to complete the task God has assigned us.



Acts 10:24 – Paul states that his life would be worth nothing if he failed to finish the race. To him there was no value in starting if he didn't plan to complete it. That meant a complete commitment to the race and all that was involved.

1 Corinthians 9:24 – Paul states that we must compete in such a way as to win the prize. The key in this is to define what the prize is. Earlier in this passage he clearly stated that his prize was the salvation of the lost. We are not competing against each other for one prize, but working together to gain a specific prize, proclaiming the message so that those who do not know the gospel will hear it and respond.

Galatians 5:7 – Paul tells this group that they had been running the race correctly but something happened and now it looked as if they were running aimlessly. In this race there is no room for distractions; no allowance for taking time out for something else and then continuing the race. Our little kingdom, our plans, are irrelevant and may cause us to fail to reach the finish line and direct others down the wrong path.

Galatians 2:2 – Paul warns them to be careful not to run the race in vain. Make sure you keep the goal in focus. There is only one true finish line. It is not about increasing membership, increasing our income, or building a bigger nicer building and so on. The race is about one goal and only one. Going, preaching, discipling, baptizing and teaching with one purpose, so that others will believe and join us in the race.

1 Timothy 4:7 – After years of missions and ministry, while in prison, Paul declares that he has finished the race. Then, in summing up, he states that he has kept the faith. He has carried out the task set before him of proclaiming the gospel in every place that God has sent him.

Hebrews 12:1 – This author challenges us to run with perseverance the race marked out before us. Races are usually clearly marked so that the competitors know exactly where they are going. Often they have markers that tell them how far they have gone and far they still have to go. The key word here is perseverance. The race, both in the preparation and in the running, requires perseverance.

So which type of race are we called to run?

It seems fairly obvious to me, based on all of Paul's letters and comments, that this race is not a sprint. It may be a marathon, more likely it is a triathlon. Why? Because it involves a commitment over time and a variety of contexts and skills.

Actually I think it may be more like another type of race that is held each year in France, called the Tour de France. This race lasts 30 days, covers

over 4000km and involves multiple types of races (sprints, middle distance and marathon) and multiple environments and climates (mountains, plains, rain, sun, fog, and more). To win the race one needs to have the best total time. In fact it is possible to never take first place in any single event but still win the first prize.

This is the race that is missions. This is the race we are in as pastors. Every day is different. We need to be prepared for a variety of conditions. It is about realizing that each day presents another opportunity to do one's best to win the prize, another soul, for the kingdom of God.

This race encompasses everything that we are and do. It will require everything we have to complete. But the reward set before us, the rescuing of the lost, is incomparable.

What type of race are you running? A sprint, a brief burst of energy that doesn't last long enough to bring about real change? Or are you ready for the real race. A race that will require all of your being and will bring about true change in your church and open the door to the salvation and discipleship of the lost sheep in all of the world?

## **The Journey - Day 15 - Chained**

*2Ti 1:16-17 because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.*

*Col 4:18 Remember my chains.*

Are there any chains in your life? Of course there are. There are attitudes, choices, beliefs, and relations that bind you and will not let you move beyond a certain point. These chains can be protective and necessary. They can also be restrictive and punitive. Depending on what they represent, we may work to hide them and deny their existence because we don't like what we are chained to and don't want to admit we are, in reality, chained to anything. Or, we may proudly display them for all to see to make it clear what our beliefs and commitments are and what people can expect from us based on the chains we wear.

Chains can take different forms.

You can be chained to the past, chained to your work, chained to a relationship and chained to a decision. You can also use a chain to anchor yourself against the storms of life and the attacks that will come. We

often don't even realize they are there until we decide we want to make changes. Then they are revealed by what is happening in our life or they are imposed by others on us.

The only way to change what we are chained to will involve some radical decisions. Decisions that may cause extensive damage to what binds you and will immediately chain you to another set of attitudes, choices and relations. The truth is, you cannot escape the reality of chains. What you can do is decide what chains you will allow to control your life and how you feel about those chains.

Another interesting aspect of this situation is that what we allow ourselves to be chained to does not mean it brings us joy or peace. It may mean we are submitting to the expectations of others, the control of others, or an unwillingness to choose something that will be an improvement over what we are chained to.

With all that said we come to the two comments by Paul in Timothy and Colossians. Remember that most often the references of Paul to his chains contain two ideas. First, he is in physical chains because of his testimony and second, that he is in a real sense, mentally and spiritually chained to his commitment to proclaim the gospel. To escape the one would mean having to break the other; a situation or change Paul was unwilling to make. He would not break the chains that connected him to God in order to be freed from the physical chains of his prison.

In Timothy Paul declares that Onesiphorus was not ashamed of his chains. Onesiphorus understood one thing very clearly. He understood what Paul's chains represented. They were not about being a political prisoner. The chains represented Paul's absolute commitment to proclaiming the gospel. Does our commitment to the gospel draw people to us and the task of proclaiming the gospel? Or does our attitude about those chains cause others to fear getting involved?

Paul rejoiced in his chains. He shared how God was working through them to open the door to many others to hear the truth. This is the attitude we need regarding the work we have been given. Are we rejoicing in where we are and what God has given us to do? Do people see that joy and seek us out to experience it and share in the work?

In Colossians Paul asks the church to 'remember his chains.' Generally we do not want people to see that we are bound, chained to anything. We want people to believe we are free and able to do what we want; that no one is our master. This is so different from how Paul lived. Paul uses phrases like slave, bond servant, and chains to describe his relationship to Jesus and his commitment to proclaiming the gospel.

Paul was not worried about gaining physical freedom. He was concerned that people would understand his total commitment to the mission of God. As you read Paul's comments about the chains you will realize that Paul's physical chains did not limit his ministry. In fact they opened more doors, more avenues to proclaiming the truth. Paul's request "to remember his chains," could easily have two components. First, pray for these physical chains. Pray that God will use them for his honor and that when the time comes to continue the work elsewhere that he would be released from them. Secondly, pray that God would further strengthen his heart and soul and also strengthen his chains of commitment to proclaiming the gospel.

Paul was not just content in a difficult time he celebrated it. He was chained to a physical location but nothing was going to interfere with the continued proclamation of the truth. Likewise, each of us are called to serve in a physical location. In a sense we are chained to that place. Are you happy with the work you have been assigned, the location where you serve? When you ask people to pray for you, what are you communicating to them about your joy in serving and discipling others? What does your prison look like? Are you praying for release or deeper commitment?

Consider the change in the apostles. On day one they were chained to their fear. They hid themselves and refused to believe that anyone could break the chains of death. After their 50 days of encounter with the Lord it was clear that they had broken those chains and had forged a new chain, one that would declare to all that they would no longer hide. A chain that gave them the courage to defy the Sanhedrin and declare two things. One that they would obey only one authority, God. Two, that no matter what happened they would always proclaim one message, one truth, that salvation is only found in the risen Lord.

They had been freed from one set of chains and forged a stronger more formidable chain to God and the proclamation of the gospel. During the journey they learned how to break the chains that bound them to their fear and forge the chains that would bind them to their Savior and the message they were given to proclaim to all the world.

The task for each of us is to review our chains, to discover which ones bind and limit our ability to carry out the mission we have been given. And to discover how to forge the chains that will reveal to all our absolute love for God and our status as approved workmen in the kingdom. These chains based on the love we have received from God and the forgiveness we have experienced. Chains we are proud to display for all to see.

What do your chains look like? Do they bring pride or cause shame? Do they honor God and draw others to the one who saved you?

## The Journey - Day 16 - For the Joy

*Php 1:4-5 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,*

We are on a journey. If you haven't asked people to be praying for you then we need to talk about the issue of prayer. If you have, then hopefully this lesson will be an encouragement to you to continue the journey and be able to benefit even more from the journey.

The letter to the Philippians has often been called the letter about joy. It can also be considered the letter of a missionary to a supporting church. Either way it is clearly about a special relationship between this group of people and the missionary, Paul, and it definitely involves bringing joy to each of those in this relationship.

Paul starts off the letter with the reason for his joy and then a plan to keep that joy in focus.

Paul's reason has three clear areas.

1. Every time he thinks about them it causes him to thank God for their relationship.  
Vs 3
2. Every time he prays for them he is reminded of the incredible partnership they have together and the truth that what God has started will last until Christ returns. Vs 4-5
3. Every time he remembers them he is reminded that God is the center of who they are together. Vs 7

Remember Paul was not able to stay long in Philippi. Actually, no one is sure how long but it was enough time to create a powerful relationship that would encourage both parties and provide a powerful foundation for the ministry in Philippi and for Paul's work.

This letter and its focus and the nature of his prayer for this church is so different from Paul's other letters. It's focus is on gratitude for how God has blessed them by sharing together in an incredible joy. The Philippians are grateful and express this in their letters, finances and in

sending someone to encourage and support Paul. He is grateful for all of that and more. He uses this letter to express his gratitude and reveal a deeper style of prayer that needs to be part of what we are doing and how we interact with our church.

Review Paul's three reasons listed above.

1. When you take time to pray for your church members what comes to mind? Struggles, conflicts, and issues; or are you immersed in an awareness of their love for God and involvement in what God is accomplishing through you and them? Do they cause you to thank God for them? Are you a source of gratitude that lifts their hearts in gratefulness to God?
2. When you take time to pray are you aware of what your people are doing? Is there evidence of a partnership? Does being together and thinking of them bring you joy for how they are making your work possible? Do they think the same about you and how working with you brings joy as they share in the work of the gospel?
3. When you take time to pray do you see how God has used them to bring about growth in your life? Do you have a longing to be with them and share in their lives because of the presence of God that is evident when you are together? Do you praise God for bringing them into your life and for their help in carrying the gospel to those who need to hear? Do they feel the same about you?

Such a relationship creates a powerful ministry. But there is even more. Paul goes on to tell us how he prays for them and in doing so suggests to them how to pray for each other and for him as a missionary.

1. Vs 9 that your love would abound more and more in knowledge and insight
2. Vs 10 that you will be able to discern what is best to be pure and blameless
3. Vs 11 that you would be filled with the fruit of righteousness

This is an incredible prayer. Imagine the joy involved in being able to pray in this way for your members and know that they are praying for you in the same manner.

Instead of praying to overcome temptation, attacks, and other negative situations, the focus here is on gaining love, knowledge, and insight. While we need protection and we are encouraged to pray for it, praying for these three concepts will give us the strength we need to deal with

any attack, opposition, or struggle that may come. This turns burdensome chains into a vehicle of ministry. This turns opposition into opportunity. This turns struggles into the means to reveal God to others.

Instead of praying for answers to the complexities of life, Paul's focus is on gaining the wisdom of God to know what is right. To know how God wants us to live. To know how to become all things to all people in order to reveal what it means to have Christ living in us.

Instead of praying for our life and health here on earth. The focus is on understanding the difference between wood, hay and stubble and silver and gold. It is about learning what the fruit of righteousness is so that we can store up treasures that will last in heaven and reveal the true results of living in a way to produce those treasures. We live and work in a way that brings honor to God and reveal the true nature of the kingdom of God. This will guide us in how to bring his will into existence here on earth.

Part of this journey is learning what to focus on when we talk to God and what we ask others to focus on related to our lives and the mission of God. The Scripture is very clear about this. Seek first the kingdom of God and you will discover what "these things will be given to you" means. We are called to ask so that we will receive. That means learning to seek, so we will find. This will require us to knock for the door to be opened.

Let Paul's prayer for the Philippian church help you see how to pray for your church and how you can to teach them to pray ,for themselves and for you, so that you and they can join together in this journey. This journey is about learning to ask the right questions, to seek what we need to learn, and to gain access to what God has for us as those called to lead the church and serve in the kingdom until Jesus returns.

## **The Journey - Day 17 - Remembered**

*1Th 2:9 Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*

If you left your church tomorrow. We already covered one aspect of this idea; that being of how the church would do if they suddenly lost your

presence and guidance in the work. There is another aspect of this idea. When you can no longer serve the church where you are and can no longer help them with the work of serving in the kingdom, what will they remember about you?

This is a very personal question and one that causes a certain amount of anxiety in every pastor because we all want to be remembered. More than that we want to be remembered in a positive way. This desire can help keep things in focus and give the strength and encouragement we need to do what is right and holy in God's eyes. Or this desire can cause us to search for other avenues to be accepted and so remembered. It can become so strong that we may lose sight of proclaiming the truth, doing the work approved by God, and leading the people in the mission and replace it by seeking to appease people and bow to their wishes. We do this believing it will cause our people to remember us positively.

This is one of the issues Paul often faced. He was concerned with what the people would do after he left and how they would view the work he had done among them and how he would be remembered. In 2 Corinthians 11-12 there is a description of the life he lived to be remembered as one who served God. In 1 Corinthians 9 there is a description of what he was willing to do to be remembered as one who served others for the sake of the gospel. He was willing to suffer much and sacrifice much to be remembered in this way.

Often Paul was forced to move on because of persecution and personal attacks. In a few cases he was able to stay longer. But in each case he wanted to be sure the people remembered him for very clear reasons. We can see how important it is to be remembered for the right reasons in this letter to the Thessalonians. This concern reflects a situation that had occurred often and Paul wanted to be sure the people understood why he had come and why he proclaimed the gospel and that they understood clearly what they should remember about his time with them. Here in this passage and the following verses Paul provides a list of the things we should be remembered for.

Ch 2 vs 9 – The toil and hardship

Ch 2 vs 9 – The amount of time committed

Ch 2 vs 9 – The level of compensation expected

Ch 2 vs 10 – The nature of the life they lived: holy, righteous, and blameless

Ch 2 vs 10 – That they (Paul and his companions) treated them like a father: encouraging and comforting,



Ch 2 vs 10 – That they (Paul and his companions) urged them to live a life pleasing to God

The focus of all this was that Paul and his companions could preach the gospel to Thessalonians and they would live a life worthy of God. And the result of this effort? 1 Thessalonians 1:8, “the message of God rang out from them to Macedonia, Achaia and even everywhere.”

Let us review the above list and use it as a tool to evaluate how we might be remembered. Keep in mind that at every level Paul’s goal is always to carry out two tasks, proclaim the gospel and prepare others to do the same.

Toil and hardship – Paul was tireless in these goals. It cost him physically. (Reread 1 Corinthians 11-12) When it involved proclaiming the gospel and discipling others no price was too high to pay. To what activity do you commit your time and energy? In what activity would people describe you as tireless?

Time commitment – Paul gave his entire life to this mission. Every activity, every plan submitted to this purpose. Family, friendships, activities – all were part of his commitment to live 100% of the time for God. Does your time with family, friends and even recreation reveal the commitment of your all to God?

Compensation – For Paul the greatest reward, the greatest benefit was not in the money or possessions he received. He declared that he had learned to be content in every situation (Ph 4:11-12). If necessary he would find a job to avoid confusion about finances and what he deserved for his labor. How are you living today? Does your lifestyle draw others into a life of giving? Or, do people only see how much it costs to employ you as their pastor?

Your life – Paul was always focused on living a life that honored and brought glory to God. A holy life, one fully committed to God. A righteous life, one that clearly revealed the truth of God. A blameless life, one that placed others first. So how would people describe your life? Would they use any of these three words?

Fatherly – Paul was not afraid to encourage and comfort people. And as a good father ready to correct when needed. Correction properly done brings encouragement and comfort. Paul was not afraid to challenge people to grow, to mature, and become all that God wanted them to be. His letters are filled with both, but always with a key focus, service in the mission of God.

Life pleasing to God – In the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians you find a description of a life pleasing to God. Paul’s goal was for them to imitate him (vs 6) and become a model to other believers; people who welcomed the message with joy and proclaimed this message to others (vs 8). Is there evidence of this in your ministry? Is your life a model to others, a model that causes people to want the joy you have found and to share that joy with others?

Paul’s goal in this passage was to do all of this in a way that would not burden to those he had been sent. Those he was called to reach with the gospel. At times the process was simple (Philippians, Berea, Thessalonians). At other times there were challenges to be overcome (Corinthians, Galatians). There will always be challenges and triumphs.

Don’t wait. Work on developing in your life the right reasons to be remembered.

## The Journey - Day 18 - Farm work

*2Ti 2:6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.*

The Bible uses several images to describe a servant in the kingdom of God. The most popular is that of the pastor caring for his sheep. Another is the farmer caring for his vineyard. Both provide a different perspective or perspectives related to the work that is involved in the mission of God.

The question for us is this, why use the concept of a farmer?

One of the key ideas is that of seasons in the life of a farmer. His work involves various periods of activity.

1. Preparation – getting everything ready for the work that lies ahead
2. Planting – cultivating the land, planting the seed
3. Caring – weeding, fertilizing, protecting the plants
4. Harvesting – collecting the fruit of the work
5. Sharing - providing family and others with the products
6. Storing – guarding some as seeds for the next round of work

These seasons can be used to describe clearly the life of those called to serve, as well.

1. Preparation – Studying God’s Word continually and observing those we are called to serve

2. Planting – Preaching and teaching what we have learned
3. Caring – Discipling people so that they will grow
4. Harvesting – Seeing people saved, baptized, and sanctified.
5. Sharing – Sending those that are ready to reach others
6. Storing – Developing locally to improve the work we are doing.

The work of the pastor is not just about preaching or teaching. It is about understanding where your church is at this moment and providing what is needed to continue the work in the cycle of development and ministry. I use the word cycle because, if you think about it, when you reach season six that leads you back to season uno. Ministry, the mission, is about keeping the cycle of growth and development going. It can also mean that you may be dealing with groups of people at different points in the cycle. Each time people are saved the cycle begins for them.

Another key idea is that of results. It doesn't matter if we are working in a garden, an orchard, or a vineyard. The goal is always to produce a product that will sustain us and others. We need enough to feed ourselves and have sufficient to begin the cycle again next year. We also need extra to deal with how to gain needed resources and supplies that we are unable to produce.

In my experience with farming I learned that no farm or farmer is self-sufficient. No farmer has all the skills and resources for all of the tasks. He needs tools that someone else makes, he needs clothing that someone else manufactures, he needs resources that come from someone else's labor. In order to obtain these items the farmer must trade or sell some of his produce. This means others will benefit from his efforts and he is able to continue the cycle listed above.

Ministry, likewise, is not about just meeting our personal needs. It is realizing that what we are doing is part of a much larger picture or sphere of activity. Yes we need to work to care for ourselves and provide for our needs but this should always be done in the context of how our actions will benefit others. In this way we gain access to resources that will help us do a better job. Ministry is about helping each of us see how we fit in the bigger picture of the kingdom of God; about producing results that will last. (John 15:16 fruit that will last)

A final key is that of risk. Farming is always about risk. You take seed and you throw it away. Well, you plant it. But that puts the seed at risk; it could be because of too much /lack of water, insufficient fertilizer, lack of protection or not enough sun. Vineyards and orchards face risks as well from weather and insects. I have learned much about orchards from a friend. Each year he faces a number of risks related to the care of his

trees that could reduce or ruin his harvest. The truth is nothing is guaranteed, but nothing will be gained if you don't take the necessary risks to plant the garden, or orchard, and take care of it.

The church in Antioch took a big risk and sent out their best. Paul and Barnabas took many risks to preach the gospel and plant churches. And this pattern was repeated over and over. Maintaining the status quo or protecting what they had was never an option for them.

Over all of this is one more idea that drives everything else. A farmer has a clear idea of what he is doing and the results he expects. This defines all of his activity in all of the phases. This helps him to be patient when needed and to persevere in the work. His work is not accomplished overnight. He needs a clear understanding of what is involved and does what is needed at each step in the process.

As you consider all of this remember that you are the tenant, not the owner of the farm. The owner is God and he prepared everything so that you would be able to produce a harvest. A harvest of souls. The issue is not what type of farm it is or how big the farm is but that there is clearly a harvest, evidence that you are doing the work and that you are persevering in the work. In doing so you and others will benefit from your faithfulness.

Farming is not about numbers. You can have acres of farmland, but if they are not cared for properly you will have a poor harvest. As a pastor, you can have all your seats filled but may produce nothing beyond that. It is not about counting bodies. It is about producing disciples and benefiting those who need to taste the fruit of our labor in God's vineyard, from God's garden.

As you keep this in focus you will see, like the farmer, that this work takes time and commitment. Pastor, you will not change yourself or the church through the next sermon, next teaching event, or next pastoral call. Real change is the work of the Holy Spirit. You are called to be the chosen instrument through which He works and it will require the commitment of a farmer for you to carry out your responsibility. This is accomplished step by step, in doing the work that is needed for there to be a harvest and be able to continue the work into the next cycle or the next generation.

What kind of farmer are you? Do you see the possibility of a work that can reach beyond where you are to others? Do you see what you need to do for your church to be fruitful? What will you risk in planting and caring for your church so that you can share with others?

It is a continuing cycle of activity. It is hard work. It produces blessing for the workers and for many others. The farm is the world. The seed is the gospel. The more people you get involved the easier the work and the more who will benefit from the labor involved.

## The Journey - Day 19 - Crown

*1Pe 5:3-4 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

Peter reflects on what it means to be a leader in the church. He challenges his readers to be shepherds of the flock for which they are responsible. Then he describes how a leader should view this work using a couple of key phrases.

1. Overseer – because you are willing
2. Not greedy – because you wish to serve
3. Not lording – because they need to trust you
4. Examples – because they need direction

After sharing these four ideas Peter then declares that when the Chief Shepherd returns those who follow these guidelines will receive a crown of glory. As we review each of these ideas reflect back on the comments about the work given Peter in caring for the sheep (John 21).

**Overseer** – We have many terms that we use today for this concept. Words like boss, director, foreman, or supervisor. There are two aspects of what these words represent. First, the attitude of the person in charge and second, the response of the workers to that person. If the overseer does not enjoy his work, if he doesn't want to be supervising others this will create any number of problems. There is not enough time or space to list them but it is important to take time to think this through. What do you think would happen if you, as the overseer was unhappy and unwilling? What reasons are there to do a job you don't like and how will that affect the quality of your work and its impact on others? How would this affect the attitude and productivity of the workers?

**Greed** – Peter talks about money as the key goal of greed but it can easily be related to other concepts. Greed for possessions. Greed for control. Greed in relationships. A desire to have personal gain even when it will

cost someone else to get what I want. In other words, work is not done for the benefit of others but for my benefit.

Lording (dominating others) – In this leadership style there is no team, no fellowship. I am in control and everyone will do what I have to say. No one else knows what to do or can improve on what I am doing. The “lord” uses his experience and his education to keep people under his control. In some worlds they call this micro-managing. Every decision, every action must be approved by the leader. There is no freedom to serve. No possibility that God could speak through someone else. Are your people willing to share their ideas and what God is teaching them? Are you, pastor, willing to let others lead?

Examples – Be an example to the church. In the first three items Peter warns his listeners of the danger of negative ways of leading and caring for the flock. He uses words that signify control. But here he shifts and focuses on the need for being a positive influence. This word is about leading. He challenges the pastors to let their members see them live as servants who truly love the Lord and love others the way God loves them. Let them see how you love the lost, love those struggling, love those who are members of the family of God. Your example will cause others to copy your life and attitude.

Do an evaluation of yourself and then think about Peter’s next comment. “When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory.”

Everybody loves to receive presents and awards. More so when we feel we have done something to deserve such recognition. In this case Peter tells us that for those who are good shepherds and carry out their responsibilities in the manner described above there will be a reward. Peter describes it as a crown of glory. Here are a few other descriptions of this reward

- Crown that will last - 1 Corinthians 9:25
- Crown of righteousness – 2 Timothy 4:8
- Crown of life – James 1:12

It is an interesting concept to receive a crown as a reward. But which kind of crown? There are two possible understandings of this object. The most common is a crown of authority and power. In royalty, this represents the right to rule and is worn by one person at a time. I doubt this concept is applicable to our promised crown and the kingdom of God, which has only one king - one that reigns over heaven and earth. Hence there is no room for a private kingdom of my own, no chance of replacing him at any time, no chance of him submitting to anyone.

Our crown is more likely to be like the crown that was common among the Greek and Roman cultures. It was a symbol of victory and reward. Depending on the group bestowing such a reward, these crowns were usually made of various plant products. This explains the idea that they would fade away in time. That would also fit with the passage in Corinthians and other places that mention a reward. There is one key difference. Unlike the earthly crown that fades our heavenly reward will be eternal. When we serve correctly in the kingdom of God we become eligible to receive such a crown as a special reward from God for faithful service.

We are not to look for the praise of men and this world. It will not last. It may appear good to try to fulfill the desires of others, to try to make ourselves happy, or try to do the work to benefit ourselves and our group. In doing so we may gain a level of recognition and self-satisfaction, but it will not last. The crown will fade and we will need to start over at earning another crown from our peers, our family or...

The crowns of righteousness and of life are not so easy to define. Maybe this is the concept that Jesus tried to teach with the parable of the talents found in Matthew 25 and Luke 19. It was not about how much the servants were responsible for or how much was gained that earned them praise from the master. It was the fact that they accepted what had been entrusted to them and used it wisely. All but one sought to multiply what they had received and earned the master's approval.

The reward? A greater opportunity to do the master's work, a greater opportunity to demonstrate to others what it means to live in the kingdom, a greater opportunity to see others follow your example. An interesting note is that even a small gain has value. The key is not how much is gained but the willingness to invest one's life in the service of the king.

So. 1. Are you a worthy servant in the kingdom? 2. What do you think your crown will look like?

## **The Journey - Day 20 - Inspired**

*Mt 26:13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

What is it that inspires people to do something of eternal value?

Many may use the following people and activities as a source of inspiration.

- Michelangelo – Painting the Sistine chapel
- Charles Lindbergh – Solo flight across the Atlantic
- Simon Bolivar – liberating people from Spain
- Gandhi – overcoming an enemy through peace
- Neil Armstrong – First man on the moon

Or

- Widow – loaf of bread – 1 Kings 17
- Teenager – 5 small stones – 1 Samuel 17
- Widow – 2 pennies – Luke 21
- Adulterer – tears – Luke 7
- Small boy – 5 loaves and two fish – John 6
- Woman – jar of perfume – Matthew 26

*When we look for inspiration we often think of the great things people have done to inspire us. Why?*

*We look for great people with great ability and great dreams to inspire us. Why?*

*We look for great opportunities to do what no one else has done. Why?*

In the first list we have examples of each of these. The question and reality is, how many of us have the ability of a Michelangelo, the dream of a Gandhi, or the opportunity to do something great like Neil Armstrong? Very few of us. This makes Jesus' comment in Matthew even more significant. Added to that, he repeated over and over that we should not seek places of honor or notoriety (Mt 19:30, 20:16, Mk 9:35, 10:31, 10:44 and so on).

But what we can all do is something that, in the world's eyes, appears insignificant.

- A loaf given to a servant of God made possible a year's worth of food. That was a blessing for the widow, her son, Elijah, and maybe many others.
- Five small stones, one of which felled the giant, changed the course of a battle.
- Two pennies given in faith gained more honor and respect than two full bags.



- Five loaves and two fish fed a multitude and revealed that great things are not restricted to adults and those with great wisdom.
- The tears of an outcast brought forgiveness and hope to all who feel they are beyond hope.

A jar of perfume.

This small action does not appear to have a specific result like the others, except to prepare Jesus for his death and burial. But consider this one interesting feature. Once the jar was broken, the scent of the perfume filled every corner of the room and probably farther. It immediately caused a response. For some the response was very negative. The people would not consider it an act to honor Jesus. All they could see was the apparent wastefulness of the action. How will people evaluate your action done in Jesus' name?

A jar of perfume.

This was a very costly item. Something that a person reserved for a future time. Something kept for a dear family member, their own burial or unknown point in time. It was not easy to sacrifice because of the cost and the fact that once used, it likely could not be replaced with ease. It was more than the sacrifice of finances. It was the sacrifice of a future event, for Jesus, in the present. We all plan for the future, we all have a tomorrow we hope for and prepare for, but will we sacrifice that for the need of today and leave God to care for the need of tomorrow?

A jar of perfume.

How much courage did it take for this lady to enter a room filled with visitors and approach Jesus? How much effort was involved in opening that jar and then pouring its contents on the head of the Lord? Probably a lot of courage and effort considering the setting, the uniqueness of the action, and the response of the people. When God directs, will we have the courage to do what he says no matter what?

A jar of perfume.

Inspiration is a complicated thing but I have begun to realize that more often than not it starts with something small or simple. Remember the lists above. Most of us cannot do something like the first list, but we can all do what is in the second list. Small things become the start of something greater. What small thing do you need to do today to help someone see God, to help someone serve God, to start...?

A jar of perfume and a sacrificial act. Jesus told us this is what will be remembered in the kingdom of God. The simple things we do for others;

the care we have for the needs of others. Inspire someone today by doing something small that will cost you to do so.

The loaf was the last loaf, the stone placed the boy in danger, the tears caused ridicule and judgment, the pennies were all she had, the bread and fish, for a child, meant more than we can imagine. The jar of perfume represented a chance to honor God with her possessions. You cannot plan inspiration. It flows from your relationship with God. Inspiration is being willing to be where God wants you to be, and when God wants you there, to do what God wants, no matter how small or insignificant it may appear. Are you ready to be inspired or inspire someone?

## The Journey - Day 21 - THE Gospel

*Mk 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

Have you ever wondered why Mark makes this statement in the first verse? Like most of people, we think of the gospel as a summation statement: Jesus came to die for our sins, was crucified and resurrected so that all who believe will be saved. Marks declaration, however, suggests that it is so much more.

To add to this concept consider the following texts:

- Mt 28:20 - teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
- Jn 20:31 - But these are written that you may<sup>a</sup> believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
- 1Jn 1:3-4 - We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Even more interesting is where each of the gospels begins their account of the gospel of Jesus. Matthew begins with a genealogy and announcement of the coming birth of the messiah as well as part of the story of Jesus' birth. Luke does the same and includes some extra information about the birth. John goes back to creation to begin his gospel. Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. In fact all of the gospels include the ministry of John the Baptist as part of this gospel and three of them quote a passage from Isaiah announcing this ministry.

It now becomes evident that the whole gospel is much grander than the summation statement above.

To better understand this let us look at a definition of the word gospel. Strictly translated it simple means good news. In the case of the four gospels “the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as provided by our Lord and preached by His disciples (New Unger’s Dictionary, 1988)

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary (1986) has the following expanded explanation:

The gospel is not a new plan of salvation; it is the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation which was begun in Israel, was completed in Jesus Christ, and is made known by the church.

The gospel is the saving work of God in His Son Jesus Christ and a call to faith in Him ([Ro 1:16-17](#)). Jesus is more than a messenger of the gospel; He is the gospel. The good news of God was present in His life, teaching, and atoning death. Therefore, the gospel is both a historical event and a personal relationship.

In the New Testament we find this term used in several ways.

- Paul also calls it the gospel of God – 1 Th 2:8-9 (Peter uses this phrase in 1 Pe 4:17)
- Jesus talks about the Gospel of the kingdom (or good news of the kingdom) – Mathew 24:14; Luke 4:43 et.al
- Peter refers to it as the gospel of peace – Acts 10:36 (Paul does the same in Ephesians 6:15)
- Paul calls it the gospel of Christ – Romans 15:20; Galatians 1:7; Philippians 1:27

We know we are clearly called to proclaim the gospel. We know the heart of that message is summed up in John 3:16 that God loved us so much that He sent his only son Jesus to die for our sin so that everyone who believes would be saved. But as you review the definitions and passages above it becomes clear that the gospel is so much more than repent and be baptized. It is about a life fully committed to knowing God and living in the way that Jesus showed us and taught us to live. The gospel is about having a relationship with Him; knowing that God has provided the way for that to happen.

To be clear the gospel began the day man was created, as John writes in his gospel. God established his plan for us. We failed very quickly. So he

began the plan to restore us in that moment. The Old Testament contains the history of God preparing the way. There is good news for us, the gospel of God is in every part of the Old Testament. God, from the beginning, has been telling us about his plan to save us. Every book helps us understand what this means.

Both Old and New Testament declare for us that this will take a specific form called the “kingdom of God,” “the gospel of the kingdom of God,” or “of heaven” depending on the author. It is about a new way of living that will not be restricted by human boundaries and preconceptions of how a kingdom functions. This kingdom will be built on the concept of peace, so it is the gospel of peace, of restoration, of trust, of revelation of the truth. This gospel is centered around one key person, the gospel of Christ. He is the one person who can and did make possible all that had been promised by God about the gospel in process.

Here begins the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the next step in the gospel of God. It is about revealing the mystery Paul talks about in Romans 16:25, the bringing of the gospel of the kingdom to earth. The establishment of life based on the gospel of peace. Wow.

The message we have to proclaim is not just about getting people saved. It is about revealing God to them and then living in relationship with God. It is about people discovering the depth of Jesus’ statement to the disciples in John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.” And John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”

When we preach only the simplest form of the gospel we fail in so many ways. Let us commit ourselves today to preach the whole gospel of God. To reveal how much God loves, how much he has done for us, and what is possible when we understand all that Jesus taught us about having a relationship with our Father. Let us proclaim every word given to us so that we can have true peace, a restored vibrant relationship with our Creator.

## **The Journey - Day 22 - My Gospel**

***Ro 2:16** This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

***Ro 16:25** Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ*

*2Ti 2:8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel,*

These statements of Paul's pose an interesting question. Does each of us have a gospel?

To answer this question there are two ideas that we need to keep in focus.

1. That we are called to be imitators of Christ
2. That the gospel is the good news about God's plan of salvation

If I am an imitator of Christ then my life should contain the good news about Christ. If this is true then my life is part of God's plan, or good news, for all of mankind. This means that I have a gospel to share with others. It is the story of my life, how God prepared for my salvation, how He made it possible for me to find my salvation in Christ, and how He has empowered me to live that truth for all to see. And, finally, how God has made it possible for me to spend eternity in heaven with him.

As with all of the other ideas related to the gospel, Christ is the center of the story. The story begins before Christ comes into my life and covers all of what God has done to bring him into my world. The current story includes all that happens from the day I accept Christ's offer of forgiveness and am accepted into the family of God until my death and resurrection. The story has no ending because it continues on into eternity.

There is a saying, attributed to Dr. Christlieb, that is often used to help people understand how important this idea is, "for many people the only Bible they will ever read is your life." Unfortunately we really don't take the time to understand how true this statement is. Jesus made a couple of comments that support this idea.

You are the light of the world – Mt 5:14

You are the salt of the earth – Mt 5:13

The truth is that many people will make their decision about the truth and the value of God's promise not based on what they read but what they see in us. They will see the road to follow because our lives light the path. They will hunger for God because our lives have a taste, a flavor, they desire to enjoy.

The concern is that it is so easy to dim the light and alter the taste. It is too easy to become focused on my gospel and lose sight that this gospel only has eternal value as it fully incorporates and reflects the true gospel.

This was a key concern of the authors of the New Testament. They feared that people would be deceived into following a false gospel; a concern that Paul addressed in Galatians 1 (he even warned against listening to an angel if the angel in some way altered the true gospel)

Jesus warned of false prophets and even false christ. (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:11, 24) Paul expanded the list to include false apostles, false witnesses and false brothers. (2 Co 11:13; 1 Co 15:15; Ga 2:4) Peter added to that false teachers. (2 Pe 2:1)

If we are to be the true gospel, then we need to be diligent to keep our lives free of all that distracts and detracts people from seeing clearly the gospel of Christ within our own gospel. Here are a few things to think about in protecting your story from being tarnished and altered.

Focus – people are quick to evaluate why we do what we do and if it is in agreement with what we say we are doing. Keeping Jesus first in everything is essential. If we do this then we will have less trouble with the other issues that will present themselves.

Omission – We don't consciously omit critical teaching from what we preach and teach. But every time we avoid a topic because it is difficult or sensitive we are omitting that teaching. Every time we focus only on favorite topics we are omitting truth because we don't allow time for the effort involved. Every time we tell ourselves we are too busy to spend more time in study then we are omitting some aspect of the truth from our lives.

Personal interpretation – This is a dangerous area. We all have opinions. The critical issue is people can treat our opinion as truth if we are not careful. As the leader, your opinion matters. Just be careful it doesn't become a controlling factor in your gospel.

Poor preparation – The pastor has a responsibility to be thorough and honest when he needs to do more study and prayer. How many mistakes have been made because a pastor or leader did not take sufficient time to know the word of God before he/she spoke.

Fake knowledge – So many of us want to be seen as the person with the answer. To avoid saying "I don't know" we will say almost anything that comes to mind.

Poor service – Doing just enough to get by. Need I say more?

Actions – This one is huge and causes more problem than any other single area. James discusses the dangers of the tongue and revealing your faith through your actions. This is just a sample of the scriptures that deal

with how our actions can create misconceptions and errors and so communicate a false gospel. And this is not about making huge mistakes. It is about little things. It is about putting a Cristian sticker on your car and then violating the speed limit, or being rude when you are driving. It is about complaining when waiting in line, and so on.

The good news. We are not alone. We do not have to depend on ourselves. We do not have to be perfect. God understands all of the issues and he is watching over the development of our gospel and making sure the true gospel will be communicated through it. Through the gospel we have the power to live and reveal Christ.

*Ro 1:16-17 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

## The Journey - Day 23 - The List

*Ro 16:14-16 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.*

Paul mentions by name 26 people in the first 16 verses of Romans 16. He includes former coworkers, family members, and many others. Of the 26 people here we only have information about two of them, Aquila and Priscilla. The rest are only mentioned this one time in all of Paul's writings. So why bother giving us this list? Why do we need to know their names?

A little background may be of use.

First, Paul was planning to go to Rome and spend some time in ministry there. So it only makes sense to connect with people he knew in order to have a foundation on which to work and build a ministry team for that work.

Second, it appears that Paul had already had contact with these people. They were friends, supporters and coworkers over the years and the

many miles. It would be interesting to know where each came from and why they had moved to Rome.

Third, they represented the good fruit of Paul's vineyard; fruit that lasted and was actively reproducing. Paul was being a good husbandman and making sure he encouraged them in that process.

Now what can we learn from this list of names.

First, we need to be actively planning for future ministry opportunities within the church. Part of that process is knowing where to go as a congregation and the people that can be part of that ministry. This does not necessarily mean going the long distance Paul planned to go. It could be simply the next block or next neighborhood. The key is, do you know who, from your church, lives there and how to make contact with them?

Second, we need to make sure we know more than their name and that we are aware of who they are. It means letting them know we see them as valuable people for the work. You have worked with them before. They know you and you know them. They are people you can depend on to work with you.

Third, as you plan for this ministry you need to be preparing them and authorizing them to be part of the plan. It is not about what you will do but what will be done as a team. It is identifying each person's place on the team and letting them be fruitful and productive. It is about knowing their gifts and using them.

The rest of this lesson is about making your own list. A list that identifies your workers and a future ministry. It will have three parts.

A place – pick a place where you need to do outreach and mission. Also define what needs to be done.

A list of people – identify the people that live in that place or can easily be part of a ministry in that place.

A list of abilities – review the list above and identify the skills and gifts of each person and how they will contribute to the work that will be done.

If you struggle with doing this task then ask yourself why you are having difficulty? If you are honest about yourself and the ministry of your church then you will see the reasons without someone creating one for you.

Each of us should have a list of people we know and trust. A list of people we can turn to for help in carrying out the mission of God.



## The Journey - Day 24 - The Watchers

*Php 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel*

Pastors, we know that the people in our church are watching us. We know the people in the community are watching us. But how aware are we of the fact that our leaders are watching us?

From his place in prison, Paul was watching. He was listening. He observed the people who came to visit. He listened to the stories and comments that came his way. Not just from members of the church but from others who may be passing by and told him about what was happening in the community where the church was serving. He read carefully any correspondence that he received.

And what was Paul watching for? (vs 27-28)

- The nature of their conduct
- The strength of their commitment
- The unity they had
- The level of courage

And what was so significant about these items? They revealed the reasons behind their involvement in preaching the gospel. Earlier in this passage he mentioned that some were preaching out of envy and rivalry (1:15). Their focus being on selfish ambition (1:17) and false motives (1:18). However, the Philippians revealed that they were serving out of goodwill and love (1:15,16). In their case it was a willingness to suffer on behalf of Christ; to be able to contend as one for the faith (1:27).

Every one of us has people who are watching us. Members are being watched by church leaders and the pastor. The pastor is being watched by a board, a supervisor, even a former teacher. The national leader is being watched by those with that responsibility in his organization and so on.

Now for the question. How does the fact that people in authority are watching effect you? That angels are watching (1 Co 4:9, He 13:2)? That the cloud of witnesses is watching (He 12:1)? That God is watching?

This is a sobering idea and one that is important,. Because it can immobilize us with fear and worry or it can be liberating. It can immobilize if all we can see is that someone is evaluating us to find our

weaknesses, failures and ways to criticize. It can liberate if it opens doors to growth and deeper relations. It can liberate because it causes us to rejoice that others care and want us to do our best.

This is the focus of Paul's comment about being torn between leaving to be with Christ or staying to open the way for a more profound understanding of joy, and a deeper understanding of the joy of serving in the kingdom. Paul wanted those called to serve to understand that having someone watching opens unique avenues to growth and development.

Conduct – When we have a key person who is watching us and we know they want only the best for us their advice becomes a guide in how we conduct ourselves. We are freed to discover our worth and live a life of worth. This means we can conduct ourselves, live in each situation, (good, bad and everything in between) in such a way as to bring honor to the gospel of Christ. Those watching us are there to encourage us, by their presence, in all that it means to walk with Christ in this world.

Commitment – Those watching are usually aware of our commitments. They help us avoid living a secret life that may lead us down a false path and bring pain to ourselves and others. They help us formulate good commitments and support us as we endeavor to achieve the results of such commitments. Their presence and observation helps us overcome the times of weakness and makes it possible for them to celebrate the victories we achieve.

Unity – When those watching fulfill their purpose responsibly it creates unity and protects us against division. Paul was watching the church, its members, and leaders. His goal was always to help them grow in their unity. In fact, it is a central point in his introduction to describing the goal of having the attitude of Christ (2:1-2). It was a key reason for his wanting to continue living, so that together they could share in the joy that is only found when we are united in Christ. Good and faithful observers are a crucial element in this process. They suffer when we do. They rejoice when we do. They encourage and exhort and help us be united.

Courage – Faithful and proven watchers know the trials that will come. They are like beacons for those they are watching. Their presence supports us when challenges come. Their experience encourages us to keep going, to keep serving. They remind us that we are not alone and that we are loved. They help us overcome our fear and so that we can stand firm for those we are watching over.

And all through this passage there is one focus. That Christ's name will be honored and the gospel proclaimed. That the pastors, leaders and

members will experience the joy that comes as this is accomplished in the life of the church.

Go find one of those who watches you and sit down and talk about what God is doing. Let them share their insights and view of what they see. Listen and learn so that you will grow and your joy will overflow to them and them to you. Paul says that such brings a special deliverance and freedom to exalt Christ and live.

## The Journey - Day 25 - Offspring

*Col 1:7-8 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

*Col 4:12 Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, Phm 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.*

Do you have children? What kind of children are they? What control do you have over what they look like, their skills and your relationship?

What kind of children are they? If we are talking about biological children then the answers will be unique to every child. This first question is about your ability to describe your child. This relate to concepts like good, mischievous, inquisitive, talented, and so on. It is often followed by or preceded by another question. How well do you know your children? The answer to this will vary with the age of the child and can become very complicated, even when we think we know them.

The last question has several parts.

What do they look like? This is a mixed question because some aspects of the question we have no control over. It is all about genetics and everyone knows you cannot control what genes children get from their parents. Yet in another way there is control. We influence clothing, life-style, and similar areas that relate to appearance. Even when our children are struggling for more control and to establish their own identity we are influential, positively and negatively.

What are their skills? Again a mixed answer. Physical skills and the like are again influenced by genetics. But how those skills are used and developed can be influenced by parents, family, teachers, friends and others. If the parents are wise they see the skill, see the interests of their child and encourage them in using their skills to the fullest.

What is your relationship? The answer to this question ranges from great to horrible. It is also the one area in which we have the greatest chance to have some control over what our relationship will be. It is also a process that requires patience, patience, and patience. Whole books are written about this concept and how to develop a healthy relationship with your child.

So what does this have to do with Epaphras and Paul?

Based on Paul's references and comments Epaphras was a disciple of Paul who may have attended Paul's program of training that he established in the Hall of Tyrannus during his ministry in Ephesus. We are also aware that Paul never visited Colossi. This has led many to conclude that Epaphras was from the city of Colossi, was trained by Paul, and then returned to his home to help start the church there.

Paul disciplined Epaphras and in this sense Epaphras became Paul's offspring. He would be considered one of Paul's spiritual children. This means many of the questions about natural offspring can be applied to this relationship and can help us understand the purpose and goals of discipling. Remember that discipling is a key part of the process of reproduction and growth in the church.

From the standpoint of discipleship, let us consider those questions again.

What kind of children are they? Epaphras was faithful in his work. He was tireless in praying for those under his care. These qualities alone tell us much about the kind of children we should be producing as mentors. As with children, those we disciple have their own personalities. Our responsibility is to understand them and adjust so that they can grow and adapt. The goal is not to have cookie cutter Christians. The goal is help them be what Christ intends them to be.

What do they look like? As stated above we have little control over physical appearance. Color of hair, body shape, health and so on. But we do have the responsibility to teach our disciples how to deal with issues related to clothing, behavior, and how they are perceived by others. We teach them what is of true value and will bring true joy and how that is more attractive than what the world teaches. In relation to culture and personal preference we help them understand how to know what to set

aside and when to set it aside for their own growth and to help others see beyond the superficial. We help them to be themselves and look like Christ.

What are their skills? We have very little information regarding specific skills for Epaphras. It is obvious that he could communicate, he was a prayer warrior, and he understood how to lead a church. As a matter of fact, he did so well that others were talking about what was happening in Colossi. As with, our children, each disciple has unique skills and abilities. They also have special gifts and abilities that are given to them by the Holy Spirit to carry out the work. Our responsibility, as with our children, is to encourage them in the development and use of these skills, both natural and spiritual.

What is your relationship? Are they proud to call you friend, pastor, mentor, or teacher? Are you proud of who they are and what they do? Is there freedom to teach, learn and grow on both sides of the relationship? Look at what Paul says about Epaphras. He calls him his fellow servant and fellow prisoner. The first phrase correctly translated would be fellow slave of Christ (can also be translated bond-servant: one who has chosen out of love to become a slave to the master). Paul only uses this of a few people. It represents a high level of praise, honor and respect for that person. It also shows the depth of the relationship and the understanding that existed between Paul and Epaphras.

The second phrase “fellow prisoner” reveals just how deep their relationship is. Both are proud of their relationship. They are not afraid to be identified with each other even when it costs them to do so. When there is a need, they are ready to help and sacrifice, if needed, to care for the needs of the other. There is a much deeper relationship than that of a coworker, or companion. The key in this relationship is a common goal, the proclamation of the truth.

So how deep is your relationship with those you are discipling? Do people see the evidence of your life and commitment in them? Is your relationship like that of Paul and Epaphras? When you disciple others, what is your goal, to have a better member, to duplicate yourself, or to reproduce Christ’s life in them?

## The Journey - Day 26 - Joy in Suffering

*2 Ti 1:8-9 But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life.*

This is an incredible invitation. Paul is inviting Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel. How would you respond if a person from Sudan, Pakistan, or any other place where it is guaranteed that you will suffer because you are a Christian, invited you to live with them? How about being invited to a Muslim country where witnessing can result in imprisonment and even death? Would such an invitation cause you to rejoice and invite others to come with you?

Before you answer that question, here are a few more scriptures to meditate on that contain a similar sentiment:

- Ro 5:3 but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;
- Ro 8:17 if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
- Ph 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
- Col 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions,
- 1Pe 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

And finally one more

- Acts 5:41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

The apostles rejoiced and proclaimed even more forcefully the truth. They were arrested but later marched to the courts of the temple and preached even louder. The people saw the welts and wounds of the beatings. They saw their courage. Every day more and more people chose to listen to the message, chose to believe and join the growing number of believers.

When the leaders stoned Stephen to death it did not have the desired effect. The apostles continued to preach and the people who were driven out of Jerusalem spread the message wherever they went. So powerful

was their joy in Christ that suffering for Christ only strengthened their resolve to proclaim the message of salvation.

Saul (later renamed Paul) attacked people, imprisoned them and received permission to travel to other cities to do the same. Always with the threat of imprisonment, torture and possibly death. And always with the same result; people rejoicing and telling others about the joy that made such threats and dangers “light and momentary troubles” (2 Co 4:17) (Paul’s description of his personal experience of the type of suffering he used to inflict on Christians). These problems only revealed more clearly the joy before them, an ability to look beyond this temporary world into eternity and invite others to join them, to risk becoming the true conquerors of Romans 8:37, knowing nothing could ever separate them from God’s love in Christ Jesus.

So what about you? Are you ready to rejoice by suffering? Are you ready to risk your life, that of your family, and of your church for this one thing, to proclaim the gospel at any cost so that others may have the joy of knowing Christ?

Or

Will we as leaders look for places of comfort and ease? Will we look for a group that is simply satisfied with a comfortable life? Will we look for ways to avoid potential conflict over the truth and run from danger?

The truth is, preaching, with clarity, the whole gospel, was never intended to make life here simple and safe. It was intended to prepare us for a future life while inviting others to join us in the journey to heaven.

But the next step is even tougher, inviting someone to join in the suffering. Suffering for the privilege of being called a Christian. Suffering for telling the lost of the world the truth about their lives, the truth about their sin. Inviting a person to stand close enough to Jesus that they will not be able to escape attacks by Satan and all who follow Satan. And so Paul calls Timothy to join him.

This invitation was not about the possibility of such suffering but the reality of it. Paul was in prison. Paul had been beaten. Think back. This was not the first time that Paul invited others to join him in the full knowledge that they would be risking their lives. Silas joined Paul and was beaten, threatened and jailed. Maybe more than once. From our previous lesson about Epaphras it is clearly suggested that he suffered imprisonment with Paul because of that relationship and his courage in proclaiming the gospel.

Suffering for Christ brought joy. Yes, it was painful. It was frightening, and could be deadly. Yet the church grew and has grown mightily in the face of suffering.

Why?

Because it is not about the suffering. It is about the joy of seeing others released from their bondage to sin and death. It is about others finding the only true joy that comes from being restored to the creator.

There is one key point to keep in mind. Peter makes this clear. Suffering for doing what is wrong, well, that is your fault, and you deserve what happens. But suffering for doing what is right, that will bring joy. Suffering for the name of Jesus, that rings the chimes of heaven.

One final point.

Who would be willing to join you?

## The Journey - Day 27 - Disobedient

*1Pe 4:17-18 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

This is not a comfortable topic. We don't like the idea of being judged. And we don't want to be the first ones to be called to give an account of our actions. It does not matter if there is nothing wrong and we have done a good job. The idea of being judged makes us nervous. And if this is true when we are dealing with our peers or friends, then what will it be like to stand before God to be judged?

That is just the first phrase in this statement. The second is even more frightening; to be judged for not obeying the gospel of God. What is more disconcerting is that this phrase could refer to those who claim to be Christians and not those who refuse to accept the gospel.

Why would that be possible?

Consider the context. Peter is writing to Christians. He has just finished talking about rejoicing when they suffer for the truth. He is also clear that there is no reward, no blessing when Christians suffer because of their sin. The first two are clear. Yes there is suffering for obedience. Yes there is suffering for sin. But this passage takes the warning one step



farther, to one more level of suffering or judgment. It suggests there will be suffering that is a result of disobedience. There will be judgment and loss because of disobedience as Christians.

This also means that when the judgment arrives, and it will, it will begin with us. Paul talks about this as an evaluation of our actions and the reason for them. It is referred to as test of fire and only that which is done in obedience and honor to God will survive. The rest will be destroyed. (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

Jesus warns about such a judgment. He talks about people claiming to have served God but being excluded from heaven. He states that claiming to be a servant of God and acting in the name of God is not enough. (Matthew 7:21-23) He precedes this with a description of fruit trees and the fruit they produce. A good tree produces good fruit. It cannot produce bad fruit. Further a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. We could spend a great deal of time in exploring this. Instead I challenge you to think about what that means in relation to Peter's comment about what the judgment will be for those who do not obey the gospel of God.

Moving on, Jesus follows his comment about judgment with the parable of the houses built on sand and on rock. The key here is putting the words of Jesus into practice. That house will survive the storms and trials of life. It is a house that will be judged worthy. It is a house built on obedience to the words of Christ, which we have learned are part of the gospel.

So it is clear that our work will be judged. But we do not need to fear this judgment. Actually, before Peter made this comment about judgment he gives guidelines that will help us make sure we are on the right track and doing what is right. (vs 7-11)

1. By being clear minded – Don't let anybody fool you. There is only one source of truth, so fill your mind with the truth. Be diligent in your study of the Gospel of God.
2. By being self-controlled – Don't submit yourself to the control of others or to what is popular in the world. Many have lost their way in doing what God wants because they have not been careful in filtering what they allow to influence their decisions and actions.
3. By praying – Always come before God to review your plans, to learn what God wants, to seek guidance in your activities, and to be strengthened to face the challenges that lie ahead. Always come before God to listen. Learn to speak less and listen more.

4. By loving others – The more we keep others in focus the easier it will be to be obedient to the gospel. This is a freeing action. It frees us from our sin, our past. It frees others from their bondage so they can see God and become part of our lives.
5. By being hospitable – The more we learn to share the less we become dependent on the things of this world and grow in our dependence on God. It is amazing how damaging an inhospitable heart can be to one's ability to be a servant in the kingdom of God.
6. By serving others with the gift God has given – Take time to think about this concept. When we are serving others it is harder to be disobedient to the gospel. Why is this true? Keep in focus where the gift came from and why you received a gift from God.
7. By faithfully administering the grace of God – This word grace is immense. We don't deserve it but God provided it. Others don't deserve it but we are told to reveal it to them. It is about forgiveness, restoration, reconciliation, and more. When we are actively bringing God's grace to others it will be impossible to disobey the gospel of God.
8. By speaking God's words – The more we repeat the words of God the stronger the message becomes in our hearts and minds. We become anchored in its truth and strengthened in our ability to be obedient.
9. By being sure God is praised – We must never forget who created us, who saved us and who is working in our lives to prepare us for heaven. We must never assume we can make a difference without God's presence and guidance. And so on.

There are so many ways to evaluate our level of obedience to the gospel. Even more important, each of these helps us to be faithful to the gospel and gain the master's approval, to receive the declaration that we are indeed a good and faithful servant and may enter into God's joy (Mt 25:23).

Bottom line. We will be judged. What is the basis of the judgment and potential reward? Our obedience to the gospel.

And so the journey to Pentecost continues. How are you doing in your obedience to the gospel?

## The Journey - Day 28 - Mission Completed

*Jos 22:3 For a long time now — to this very day — you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you.*

How familiar are you with the history of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh?

Here is a brief review.

1. These are the tribes that represent three of the sons of Israel, Reuben, Gad and Joseph. Manasseh and Ephraim were given equal status as tribes as the offspring of Joseph.
2. After the victory over Og, king of Bashan, and the Amorites; Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh asked to be given this land as their inheritance. Moses agreed under one condition, that all those of fighting age would help their fellow Israelites conquer the promised land.
3. After many years of faithful service, Joshua released them to go home.
4. After returning home they built an altar. The other 9 ½ tribes interpreted this as an attempt to follow another God. When they heard the true reason for building the altar, (as a reminder to the other tribes that they were committed to following God and did not want to be forgotten or excluded because they were on the other side of the Jordan) everyone was pleased with such faith and went home in peace.

In this passage Joshua is honoring them for fulfilling their vow to serve their brothers and to help them gain the blessing promised to them by God. Joshua treats the promise as much more than a contract. It was a mission. And it was a costly one. It involved:

1. Years of separation from family.
2. Years of living in tents and constantly on the move.
3. Years of risk and danger because of the constant conflict with various enemies.
4. Years of dependence on others to share their food, housing and resources.

Does this sound a bit like the life of a pastor?

The work of a pastor is not just a job. It is not just an assignment. It is not just an occupation. It is a mission and it involves very clear commitments and choices. Do you remember the day you were posted to your church? Do you remember the day you received your authorization to serve as a pastor? What kind of words were used to explain your job?

The words used to describe the work of a pastor are interesting. Instead of words like employment, contract, hired, and other such words that reflect a financial or business approach, they use such words as, servant, minister, serve, obligation or called. And, in various cases, the phrase “give yourself without reservation” to this call or to this ministry is included. We are not hired to a job, there are no specific hours to determine when we have done enough. We are called to the work. This will mean:

1. Years of separation from family – usually a pastor is not called to pastor the same church where all the pastor’s or spouse’s family lives or attends. It is often far from family and often prevents the pastor and family from participating in certain events that occur during the year because of the responsibilities related to the ministry.
2. Years of living in tents – Until recently a pastor depended on the church to provide housing. This house was called the parsonage and the pastor would never consider it as his, it belonged to someone else. Now most pastors buy a house when they accept a call to a church. But it is not that much different. It is never really permanent because the Lord can send the pastor to another church or ministry at any time.
3. Years of risk and danger – This is not like the danger of battle, but serving as a pastor can place a person in dangerous environments. Caring for the lost of this world often means dealing with situations that are far from safe or comfortable.
4. Years of dependence on others – The church is not a business. Its existence is completely dependent on its members willingly supporting the work and ministry that is being done. Income is never guaranteed. Each salary is dependent on the members seeing the value of the ministry of the church and the pastor and giving to maintain them.

This work will last a long time. A lifetime. In the case of the three tribes it could easily have been for more than 20 years. That is a long time to be away from wives and children. Yet they willingly accepted the mission to care about others before themselves. They willingly put themselves at risk so that others could benefit and receive what God had promised.

Is that not the true work of a pastor? To accept the mission that God has given us? To willingly care about others before ourselves? To willingly put our lives at risk so that others will receive what God has promised? In our case it is something far grander, far more wonderful, than territory in the promised land. It is life with God and arriving at the place Jesus is preparing for us in heaven, as well as for each one we help to receive the gospel.

Our problem, what confuses us the most, is that we often confuse the ministry and all that is involved with the concept of a job and how that is defined and relates to how we live. In other words, we treat the ministry as a job and not a mission. We have specific hours that we work and are available. We have specific time frames for plans and activity. We have a clearly defined financial package to provide for our income and so on.

While it is true that we have specific times to carry out certain tasks, specific structures to guide our activity and we are reimbursed for all our activity. The truth is you cannot define the mission in such terms. It is so much more.

A mission cannot be restricted to office hours only. People don't live, die and need help according to a time clock. A mission cannot be restricted to specific structures and programs. People are not programmable. Life happens and no situation is ever exactly the same. And the real benefits to the mission are impossible to quantify in the form of dollars per hour or per week or per month. Or even an annual financial package. The business world long ago learned that money is not a good motivator for increasing efficiency and productivity. It may work in the short term but will not last.

These three tribes saw their choice not as a contract. Contracts can be broken. Contracts don't touch the heart of a person. They saw this as their mission. So how do you view your work? Is it the job you have been asked to do or is it the mission to which God has called you? As a mission, no sacrifice is too great or too small. In fact nothing is considered a sacrifice. It is seen as a privilege to serve and to give oneself completely.

## **The Journey - Day 29 - Courageous**

*Jos 24:15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served*

*beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD .*

How many of us want to be like Joshua? Victorious, courageous, and respected by all.

Joshua was indeed an incredible example of faithful committed service to the plan of God. He followed Moses everywhere. He obeyed all the commands he was given. The first battle of Ai battle is the only one he lost in all his life and he had only one moment of uncertainty. Here is a quick review of the life and history of Joshua.

- Led the people of Israel in their first battle against the Amalekites - Ex 17:9
- Accompanied Moses to Mt. Sinai and stayed with him the entire 40 days - Ex 24:13
- Accompanied Moses into the tabernacle when he talked with God - Ex 33:12
- Supported, along with Caleb, the invasion of the promised land against the advice of the other 10 - Nu 14
- Survived the 40 years of wandering along with Caleb – Nu 14:38
- Chosen to succeed Moses - Nu 27:18; Dt 3:28
- Placed in charge of dividing the land among the tribes - Nu 34:17

All of these events occurred before he actually became the leader of Israel. As he began the next phase of his life he encountered God. God said no one would be able to stand against Joshua all of his life and then gave Joshua directions that would guide him in all the decisions and battles that were ahead.

- Be strong and courageous – you will lead the people
- Be strong and courageous – be careful to obey all the law I have given to Moses, that you may be successful. Meditate on it and be careful to do everything written in it.
- Be strong and courageous – don't be terrified or discouraged for I am with you.

We see the impact of those instructions in the life of Joshua. The next three events are a good example to us of what happens when a leader is strong and courageous in obedience to God.

1. Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3) – The day had come. The instructions were clear but contained a huge choice, especially for the priests carrying the ark. They were to simply walk into the flood swollen Jordan and God would take care of the rest. This was the first test of Joshua's leadership. He did not hesitate. He gave the directions and then sent the priests into the Jordan. He trusted God, the priests trusted Joshua, and river dried up. In obedience the people crossed to the other side.
2. Circumcision (Joshua 5) – The people were in enemy territory. The first instruction had nothing to do with preparation for the battles ahead or fortifying their camp. They were told to obey God's law and have every male circumcised. They were to allow themselves to become completely vulnerable to attack. Circumcision would leave the men incapacitated for many days while they healed. There was no hesitation by Joshua. He gave the order. There was no hesitation by the people.
3. Jericho (Joshua 6) – Joshua received the strangest battle plan ever given. Just walk around the city once a day for six days in silence. Then seven times on the seventh day again in silence. Remember, Jericho was the most heavily fortified city of this region. But on the completion of the seventh trip around the city, on the seventh day, and at sound of the shout and trumpet blast, the walls fell.

Then came Joshua's moment of failure. He failed to consult God. Trusting to his own plans, he attacked Ai and lost. There was sin in the camp and it needed to be dealt with. Without hesitation Joshua followed God's instructions and dealt with the issue. After that he would never lose a battle.

The one moment of uncertainty came when God called 72 men to help Moses with the burdens of leadership. Two of the men did not come to the official commissioning service. God chose to bless them anyway, which upset Joshua. Moses rebuffed him gently stating that he wished all would be blessed by God and be prophets, not just a few (Numbers 11). Maybe this event influenced Joshua's meeting with the people of Israel at the end of his life. He challenges each of them to choose to leave the gods behind and follow God. It was not enough for the leaders to choose to follow God. It was not enough for the leaders to study the word and obey it. Each person, each family must choose and Joshua's life was a clear example of what was expected and what happens as a result of a clear choice to serve the Lord.

Now for the application.

Each of us has a history with God. Maybe not as grand or exciting as that of Joshua. But we have been selected to serve. We have been called to study and be mentored. We have been called to be obedient to the directions given us during our time as assistants, associates or disciples, and we are called to continue in this process as leaders.

Each of us will face key challenges to test our commitment to obeying God and developing our leadership. We will all have a Jordan to cross, a defining moment that God uses to establish and confirm his call to service. Each of us will deal with a key moment of trust. An act of circumcision where we must place all that we are in the hands of God. A moment that reveals who we trust and why those we lead can trust us. Each of us will have a Jericho. We will face an enemy that must be overcome; but not in our ability, intelligence, or power. This will reveal the nature of our heart and our obedience to God.

In all of this we need to be willing to open the way for all to be prophets, all to be able to serve. We will need to learn to never depend on our knowledge and on past experience. These will fail us and bring danger to those we lead.

Review the directions given to Joshua that guided him in his role and how they apply to our lives.

1. Be strong and courageous – You are called to lead, not just by your words but by who you are. Thoughts, word, and actions. You live your life so that others will learn how to live. You serve others so they will learn to serve. You teach others so that they will know God and reveal what they have learned to their family and friends.
2. Be strong and courageous – You are called to diligently study the word of God. You are called to make it the sole guide for your life. You are called to do all that it says in all of your life. You do this so that others will see the value of God's word and know the God who gave it to us. You do this so they understand what it means to prosper and have success in the kingdom of God, understanding how to gain God's approval.
3. Be strong and courageous – You will be unafraid in the proclamation of the truth. You will not be terrified by the threats of Satan and the world. You will stand firm in your desire to proclaim the gospel because you know God is with you. You will do this so that those you lead will be able to do the same and fearlessly proclaim truth and salvation to the world.



You will do all of these so that Moses' desire that all would be prophets of the Lord will come true. Because, what really is the work of a prophet? Is it not to proclaim the word of God to all who need to hear? In our case, is it not everyone proclaiming the gospel for all to hear?

Be strong and courageous – God is with you.

## The Journey - Day 30 - Blame Game

*1Sa 15:19 Why did you not obey the LORD ? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD ?"*

Saul's answer to this was: It was the soldier's fault (vs 20). Yet he used this excuse shortly after building a monument to himself in Carmel (vs 12), which makes it harder to accept his second excuse, that he was afraid of the people (vs 24). Neither excuse was accepted by Samuel and Samuel decides to leave.

Saul had been caught, but instead of confessing or owning up to his responsibility he entered the blame game. When that didn't work he started begging. He begged Samuel not to leave. "Come back with me, to honor me before the elders of my people and of Israel." (1 Sa 31:30) It is pretty clear that Saul was not understanding what had happened and what was wrong with his actions.

A few things stand out

1. Saul decided to take the road of least resistance – he was more interested in keeping his soldiers happy and pleasing the leaders than in obeying God.
2. He was afraid of the people – This is a dangerous situation. Fear controlled his actions and he was unable to do what was correct. He failed to obey God's clear directions, especially when they might have affected his popularity and acceptance.
3. He has a serious ego problem – First he built a monument to himself, then he approved the people's disobedience to maintain his popularity, and finally he expected Samuel to honor him publicly in spite of all the above.

Saul's choices reveal a couple of key issues that we need to clearly keep in mind as we travel this road from Emmaus to Pentecost:

1. Monuments – Samuel reminded Saul that when God chose him he was of no great importance, even in his own eyes. Remember Saul hid in the baggage trying to avoid the responsibility. This work we are given is not about glorifying who we are and what we have done. It is about humbly understanding what God has given and what God is doing through us.
2. Personal benefit – Samuel reminded Saul that all they had taken belonged to God. They kept the best under the guise that they could give God something better as a result of their decision. God has promised special blessings when we are obedient. However when we choose to focus on what we want and expect that God will be satisfied with what we give from our bounty, we will have the same problem as Saul. We keep the best and give what is left to God. We become no different than Saul and the soldiers. They kept the best for themselves and thought that sacrificing some of it to God would excuse this selfish and disobedient act. The reality is that our concept of the best can never adequately replace what we lose by being disobedient. A flip side of this is what people are willing to pay to increase their position and have access to more power and more riches. The gospel is not for sale at any price. (Remember the story of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. His judgment by Peter was decisive and clear for his attempt to buy control of God.)
3. Path of least resistance – Rather than enforce the orders given him, Saul backed down and let the people do what they wanted to do. He then tried to take Samuel down the same road. We do the same every time we water down the truth or every time we fear the opinions of others and fail to proclaim the whole truth. How many plans are never presented, decisions never made, because it could cause stress, discontent or dissent?

It is so easy to soften the gospel, to defer our responsibility, to let others pay the price so that we can gain the benefits. It is so easy to back down to the pressure of others and avoid conflict, avoid standing firm in God's commands. In doing Saul lost so much more than he gained. The kingdom was torn from his hands. He became a man possessed with fear of losing what was never his.

The good news is that we can avert these dangers. By:

1. Honoring God in all we do. By remembering that all of our abilities, all of our opportunities, all of what we possess has come from God. Let this truth permeate our mind and heart to

create a protective barrier against the foolishness of building monuments.

2. Focusing on the benefits others will receive. The Teacher wrote clearly in Ecclesiastes that everything in this world is fleeting. In the end there was only one thing of value, only one thing that was truly beneficial, our obedience to God. The teacher had everything and realized he had nothing until he focused on God. We have one benefit and it was prepared in such a way that the best way to experience its blessing is by giving it away to others. This is obedience, focusing on giving what we have received to others.

Over and over again in the scripture we see this truth, stand firm. From Noah to Abraham to Daniel to Jesus and everyone in between. Those who bowed to the pressure of the world, the pressure of the desires of others, the pressure of avoiding risk always lost more than they believed they would gain. If necessary go back and review the study on joy and suffering. Taking a stand may be difficult but in the end what is gained will have eternal value.

David restated Samuel's declaration about sacrifice and obedience in Psalms 51:16-7

*You do not want sacrifices, or I would offer them;  
you are not pleased with burnt offerings.  
My sacrifice is a humble spirit, O God;  
you will not reject a humble and repentant heart. TEV*

To avoid the blame game we need to remind ourselves of the truth in this passage and keep our focus on the path God has placed before us. And, to do everything we can to not allow anyone or anything to cause us to deviate from that path.

We have been called to journey with God.

## **The Journey - Day 31 - Looking Back**

*Jer 3:15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.*

*Jer 23:3-4 I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven*

*them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD .*

In general Jeremiah is not very kind to the shepherds. He is also very direct about what will happen to the shepherds and the pastures.

Here are a sample of the words he pronounced on both.

- Jer 23:1 Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD .
- Jer 25:36 Hear the cry of the shepherds, the wailing of the leaders of the flock, for the LORD is destroying their pasture.
- Jer 50:6 My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray
- Jer 25:34 Weep and wail, you shepherds; roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock. For your time to be slaughtered has come;

We understand the judgment on the shepherds. Their actions, teachings, and desires were harming the sheep. They had led the sheep, the people, astray. They had failed to tell them about God and how to live according to the word of God. They did this for personal gain and power.

But the judgment on the pasture? And why the two very different references here regarding pasture? (The destruction of the pasture of the shepherds and the idea that the Lord has his own pasture.)

Let us begin with the purpose of a pasture. Basically there are two functions. The first is to provide food. The second is to provide a place of rest. In both cases above it would appear that the pasture represented something being provided by both the shepherds and by God. So a pasture provided food or teaching, false and true. It also was a place of safety and rest, false and true.

The judgment on the shepherds is that they were leading the sheep astray and that they were under attack by various enemies. This judgment was based on their promotion of worship of various false gods, false prophecies, and a disregard for and denial of the word of God. It also involved a judgment against them for a lack of concern for the safety of those they were responsible for. The judgment goes on to say not only are they not concerned about the safety of those they led but they were sacrificing them for personal gain and pleasure.

In contrast to this is the truth that comes from God. God promises to punish the false shepherds and to destroy their pasture (teaching). This was not to be a philosophical action but an action taken in real time against the people and the land. The shepherds, or leaders, would be judged severely. That makes sense. The people would also be judged. The severity would vary somewhat from death to exile. Again that makes sense.

But why pronounce judgment on the land as well?

Remember the judgment was against the pasture of the shepherds, against their teaching. Unfortunately part of that teaching included convincing the people that everything they received from the land did not come from God; that their protection and security were not being provided by God. The people were being taught that it came from other gods and that to continue to receive provisions and protection they need to completely submit themselves to the teaching they were receiving. The following text reveals how strong this teaching was.

*Jer 44:18 But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine."*

Destroying the land was necessary to reveal how false their belief and service to the false gods were and to convince them that all they had been taught by the false shepherds was a lie. Jeremiah makes this clear in Jer 50:7 "for they sinned against the LORD, their true pasture, the LORD, the hope of their fathers." They had forsaken the truth and replaced it with lies. The judgment had to be severe to break this concept and faith. The result of this judgment is that Israel has never returned to the worship of idols.

Even more critical here was the promise that God made once he resolved this issue and ended the influence of the wicked shepherds. He promised to provide true shepherds beginning with the one true shepherd. This would provide knowledge and understanding. The sheep and the shepherds will have the word of God written on their heart (Je 31:33). The shepherds then, will have the knowledge they needed to understand how to lead.

Then God made another promise. God promised to bring his sheep back from all the countries they had been driven to. Do we dare spiritualize this? The sheep are all the people who have been scattered all over the world since the days of the tower of Babel. God is sending us, his

shepherds to all the nations to bring them back to, not to a physical location, but to the true pasture, which is God and his word.

God promises to provide new shepherds. Shepherds that will gather the sheep from among the nations. Shepherds who will bring consolation and peace. Shepherds who will care for the sheep and give them the courage they need to live. Shepherds who will lead with understanding and knowledge. Shepherds who have the heart of the creator who truly loves his sheep, his creation.

What does that mean for us today? We are being called to help people see the difference between what the world has to offer, with its false pasture and the truth, that reveals what and who can supply their needs and bring peace.

Jeremiah sounded the warning. Make sure you teach the people the one truth that matters. Don't alter it, don't amend it.

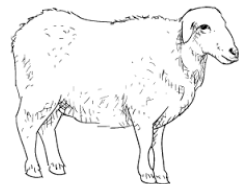
## The Journey - Day 32 - Properly Trained Sheep

*Mt 25:33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

So how are you doing in this process of 1) going to the world and 2) teaching others to go to the world to proclaim the gospel? And how do you know how you are doing, in both areas? Jesus' story about the final judgment and the separating of the sheep and the goats provides us with insight in how to evaluate what we are doing and how well we are communicating the mission to others.

First, let us be very clear that this story is about judging everyone and deciding who enters heaven and who does not. It is not about evaluating Christians and determining their reward. It is about the criteria in deciding who enters and who does not. Also this is not about calling sinners "goats" and the saved "sheep." That is an easy mistake to make. It states very clearly that the process will be like what happens when a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. It will not be complicated. It will not involve having to guess or do extensive research into the life and character of the person being judged.

To understand what I mean take a look at these two pictures. It is easy to decide which is a goat and which is a sheep. While they are similar in size they have distinct



features that make it almost impossible to mistake one for the other. And that is what the judgment is about. When we stand before God there will be no question about whether we have been forgiven or not. Jesus will stand beside us and there will be clear evidence of a changed life; a life that reflects the one who saved us and shows us how to live.

Jesus then lists a series of ideas of what this changed life means and the evidence of this new life in the verses following Matthew 25:33. It also gives us a good idea, as pastors, of what should be happening in the lives of the people we are responsible for as we journey from Emmaus to Pentecost and beyond. So let us consider the list.

1. Hungry – Do we and those we lead see the hunger around us. Hunger exists at different levels. There is physical hunger. Are we caring for the physical needs of the people around us? Not just those of our church family but those in danger of starving, of freezing, of dying of sickness. There is emotional hunger. Are we caring for the hunger for friendship and a sense of belonging for those who feel deprived of basic emotional needs and stability? There is spiritual hunger. Are we seeing the hunger for truth in the eyes, expressions, and actions of the people we come in contact with? There are so many people that want to believe and hunger for the truth. They are the whitened harvest that Jesus refers to on several occasions.
2. Thirsty – People can last a long time without food but the chances of survival without water are more limited. As with hunger, there is more than one level of thirst. We need water physically for our bodies to function. Without it our bodies become poisoned and we cannot maintain the correct physical environment internally for us to live. We need water emotionally. We need contact with others on a consistent basis. There is no replacement for water. We need support and encouragement and more to function properly and develop into a whole and mature person. We need spiritual water. We need continued contact with God and his word and with those who know God. People are thirsty. They are looking for a well of spiritual water that they can draw from whenever they need such refreshment and encouragement to continue the journey with God or in their search for God. Are we providing such refreshment physically, emotionally and spiritually?
3. Stranger – How do we do when we encounter strangers? When the strangers are members of the family it doesn't take long to build relationships and trust in each other. We are also excited to meet a brother or sister of the family of God and quickly

become friends. But how do we do with those who are not of the family of God? Are we quick to see them? Are we quick to realize what they need? Do we make them come to us first or do we see them and go to them? Do we remember what it was like before we knew God and how we were estranged from God until someone saw us and cared for us? Accepted us? The lost are strangers. They need us to see them and welcome them. How we do this will be as varied as the people involved.

4. Naked – Are there really people in the world who are naked? I have seen some. They are so exposed to the dangers of the world that they are naked and defenseless. There are people who are so poor they have only one set of clothes; barely enough to protect them from the prying and judgmental eyes of the world. They are exposed. People are quick to take pictures, quick to judge, but very slow to protect them from the criticism and judgment of others. This judgment is passed with no desire to understand what has happened to make them naked and unprotected. We are called on to expose the lies of sin, but we are also called to clothe and protect people from further danger, further risk. What are we doing about injustice? What are we doing about saving them from Satan? What are we doing about saving them from the damage the world causes in each person?
5. Sick – When people are hungry, thirsty, estranged and exposed it is inevitable that they will become sick. Do we see the symptoms of sickness, physical, emotional and spiritual? Do we know how to respond to the various forms that sickness can take? It is so easy to hide when we might be in danger. Do we sit down next to the dying person, even when it places us at risk? Do we go to their house, or the hospital to comfort them, or even the funeral home to minister to those affected by what is destroying their lives? Sickness is not just about physical ailment. There is disease of the body, mind and soul. What are we doing about each of them?
6. Prison – The outcasts, criminals and deviants of this world are all around us. Some manage to avoid capture. Many do not. It does not matter where they are, they are all in a prison, whether built by the government or built by their own actions and choices. The question is, do we open our eyes so that we can see them and go to them? They are trapped. To free someone we must come close enough to the prison cell in order to release the latch, lock, or ropes that bind them.



Pastor, as we journey together, each of us needs to evaluate how we are doing and if our sheep are showing signs of joining us on the journey. Each church is different. So the response to each of the above may be different, but like separating sheep and goats, it will be easy to identify what is happening. You will know if your ministry is truly fulfilling the mission God has given you where you serve.

## The Journey - Day 33 - The Celebration

*Lk 15:4-7 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

There are three interesting points in this parable to consider as we continue the journey.

1. We will encounter lost people along the way which will require us to make decisions about priorities and ministry.
2. When we choose to seek out the lost it will have an impact on the life and activity of those that are already in the fold.
3. When one who is lost is found it causes a celebration that seems excessive when compared to the treatment of those already in the fold.

These points are repeated in the parables of the lost coin and the prodigal son. They are also present in another parable, the parable of the landowner and his hiring of workers (Matthew 20:1-11). Each of these looks at the needs of those outside of the main group. Each of them looks at the impact of this action on the thoughts and lives of those who remain behind while the search for others continues. Each of them looks at the impact of the lost receiving an equal or greater blessing than those who have been faithful and have not caused concern to the owner.

The parable quoted above gives us the bare bones of the situation. There are people who are lost and in need. To rescue them will require us to leave the faithful behind or impact their lives in some way. In this

parable, this action is described as leaving the sheep in the open country. For the prodigal son, the elder brother remains and is expected to faithfully serve in his father's farms. In the story of the landowner, each time he goes in search of more workers, those that have been hired are expected to continue their work without complaining or taking a break. As for the 9 coins, I would imagine they are left in place with the belief that they will not become lost or stolen.

Pastor, in this journey we have three clear areas of responsibility. 1. We are to seek out the lost. 2. We are to be aware that we need others to be faithful in doing their work to make this activity possible. 3. We are to celebrate the return of the lost and help others celebrate this event and understand why we need such celebration. It is interesting how each of these steps involve more effort.

1. Seeking out the lost – This is really quite simple. The lost are all around us. And like a lost sheep they make a lot of noise. While we may know their location, it may take some effort to reach them. The lady cleaned her entire house in search of the one coin. It also may require a great deal of patience. The father probably had taught his prodigal son the truth, but then had to wait for the teaching to work in the son's life. And the work must be continued. The land owner went in search of workers throughout the day. Each time he went he found more in need. Each of these parables gives us a different perspective what is involved in seeking out the lost and leading them home. One time it involved physically lifting the lost, in another, recovering the lost involved a diligent and thorough search. For the prodigal, it was being ready to welcome him no matter what had happened and at any moment. For the land owner it meant making an offer and allowing each person to choose how to respond. The key is to be always searching, always watching.
2. Impacting the church – Again, three different responses. In the first the shepherd leaves the sheep in the open. They are free to move about and live. In this case the members are not restricted but given freedom to function (minister in the mission) without constant supervision. With the coins it is a little less clear. We don't know where the lady left them. What we do know is that her attention was not on where they were or what was happening with the other coins. There was no threat of further loss. As we send others into the world, our teaching and training should be sufficient so that there is no threat of losing them. They are firm in their knowledge of the truth and confident that

they can continue serving with a minimum of supervision. The older son. His own comments tell us that while his brother was gone he carried out all of the work given by his father. He had learned how to be responsible. Also, the workers hired by the landowner did their work. They were convinced that what they did would be rewarded. The work done would be adequate evidence to support this. There was a clear goal - complete the harvest. We need to be sure everyone knows what the mission is all about and what they are responsible for in the harvest.

3. Celebrating the return – For me this is the most difficult aspect of the work of leading a church in the mission. The difficulty is defined clearly in these stories, as well as the scope of what is happening in the celebration. Angels celebrate the return of one lost person more than the faithfulness of the 99. The lady celebrates finding the lost coin and almost forgets the 9 that were not lost. The father holds a feast in honor of the prodigal, even though he has squandered his inheritance. The land owner pays the man who barely works an hour the same pay as the ones who worked 3, 6, 9, and 12 hours (a full day).

In two of the stories those who have worked faithfully complain about what they feel is unfair treatment; an unequal distribution of the benefits in relation to the work done. In the other two, we have no information about how others felt, only that there was a great celebration for the one that was found. In a way, it does appear unfair and even unjust. Why such celebration for the lost and so little celebration for the rest?

The answer is quite simple. Those that are faithful are able to enjoy daily the blessing of belonging to the kingdom of God. They live in the knowledge that every day they will be cared for, that they have been saved, that they have access to the Father. They have the joy of spending years, even a lifetime in this reality. They have experienced the Father's love and care each day and in so many ways.

There are many lessons for us to consider as we help people understand what they have so that we can be freed to seek out the lost. Consider this as you teach and encourage others. What would have happened if the shepherd could not seek out the lost sheep because he was constantly worried that the others would run away? What would have happened to the search for the lost coin if the lady was in constant fear of being robbed? What would have happened to the father's ability to watch for the prodigal if the other son was constantly complaining and causing problems? Finally, what would have happened if the land owner could

not leave to find more workers to share in the work because he could not trust those he had already hired? What would have happened to his vineyard , the harvest, and his ability to provide work and resources in the years ahead?

The lost are waiting. Are we free to go or are we restrained by an unprepared church who cannot see the harvest? We should already be celebrating every day as God cares for us and opens the way to find the lost. But, the greater celebration happens when a lost soul is found.

## The Journey - Day 34 - Scattered

*Ac 8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*

There are a number of ways the idea of scattering is used in scripture. The most common relates to the planting of various types of crops and the scattering of the seed. The other relates to God scattering the people of Israel among the nations. Here in this passage both ideas are combined. The people are scattered, driven out of Jerusalem, but this also causes the scattering of the gospel, the seed that brings life to those who allow it to grow in their lives. In reality the scattering of the people of Israel became a key factor in the spread of the gospel and the creation of good soil to receive it in many of the cities where they lived.

So how does this work?

There are two key examples of what happened with the scattering of the believers after the death of Stephen. The first is that of Philip, the activity of an individual (Acts 8). He left Jerusalem and traveled to Samaria where he began a work that grew so rapidly that the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to help with the work. Then Philip was sent to a lonely road in the desert where he met the eunuch from Ethiopia and led him to accept Jesus as his savior. (History records that not long after this, with the help of an apostle, the Coptic church was started in Ethiopia.) Philip then was transported to Azotus and he traveled about preaching the gospel until he reached Caesarea where he stayed and ministered.

The second example involves a group of men who traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Then some of them, who were from Cyprus and Cyrene, traveled to Antioch and began preaching to the Greeks. The response was so great that the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to help with the work. Barnabas then sought out Paul to assist him. This group traveled a great distance to return to their home to share the gospel and

then continued spreading out until they reached Antioch. They were part of the process of sending the first missionaries, further scattering the word. Up until this time the gospel message presentation had been restricted to mainly Jews, with a few exceptions. This all changed because of the scattering that began with Stephen's death.

The door to ministry in Jerusalem closed. Well, not completely closed, but it was blocked in such a way that it forced the people to leave the city and go back to their homes. Or, if not home, they found somewhere that they could continue their study of the truth and share that truth with others. They never even considered being silent. They never thought about their limitations. The focus was on scattering the gospel wherever they were scattered.

The question is, what would have happened if they had not been scattered? Would the gospel message have reached to other cities, regions and countries?

What would the church look like today if the first believers had never left Jerusalem? What would any church look like if it never left the building?

Would those who came for the festivals in Jerusalem respond to a message given by people who never left their homes, never risked anything for the truth they proclaimed? Would they believe that what was happening in Jerusalem could happen where they came from or would they believe that they could only experience the power and presence of the risen Lord when they visited Jerusalem? Would this new belief become a blessing for the select group of people, those who were willing to pay the price to travel to Jerusalem?

These are profound questions that we should ask of ourselves as leaders, and of our church. In fact, there are many cult leaders who teach these very ideas; only those who come to my church, who listen to my teaching, who submit to my authority can receive the blessings of God. But could that not happen to any of us if we begin to look inward, to look at what we have, and so on?

What happens when we do not allow the Lord to scatter us like seed in the fields of the world?

We build shrines and require people to come to the shrines. We establish traditions that we expect people to follow. We establish a culture to maintain the shrines, the traditions and to extend our control. We begin to treat the location as more important, as essential to people receiving the truth. If we do this, we create a false religion. One that cannot save, one

that cannot truly change the world. A false religion binds and enslaves all who come.

Jesus, from the beginning, taught the disciples that this would happen. He knew from the beginning that the gospel would not be tied to a particular location, building or tradition. He told it to the Samaritan woman. He said it is not where you worship but who you worship (John 3:21-24). He told the disciples he had other sheep that were not part of Israel (John 10:16). And now came the time to scatter the seed; to begin the process of carrying the truth to the farthest ends of the earth. It started with individuals like Philip. It followed groups like the men of Cyprus and Cyrene. Everywhere they went more seeds were scattered and the cycle began again.

God wants us to scatter the gospel to the world. We are to be both the seed and the sower; an interesting way to live. The goal is to be planted in order to produce a harvest that will make it possible to continue the process of spreading the gospel ever farther. Each of us must work at preparing and then scattering our flock. Preparing them to go out into the world and produce a harvest of souls. It is the work we have been called to.

Are your sheep ready to proclaim the gospel wherever they may go in this world? Could God allow your church to be closed, knowing that it would result in the planting of more churches and more people hearing the gospel than would ever be possible by staying where you are today? It is an interesting idea; but certainly not part of the list of approved methods for church growth and evangelism. Would you fear for your sheep's faith or be confident that they would flourish wherever God sends them?

This journey is definitely not about establishing a home or residence. It is not about building a kingdom or personal realm. It is about always being ready to go where we are sent, whenever we are called to go. On this day it took the death of Stephen and the rise of persecution through Saul to get people moving. Don't wait for some unique event to get the people motivated. Teach them, prepare them, so that God can send them.

Let the sheep be scattered and the seed be planted.

## The Journey - Day 35 - Goads and Nails

*Ecc 12:11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails — given by one Shepherd.*

I have long enjoyed the book of Ecclesiastes. It provides so many interesting ideas and concepts to explore. We are familiar with many of its passages such as:

1. There is a time for everything. ch 3
2. Everything is meaningless (vanity) ch 1
3. Fear God and keep his commandments ch 12
4. Cast your bread on the water and it will return to you ch 11
5. Remember your creator in the days of your youth ch 12

There are many other passages that are useful in helping us to understand what we are to do as pastors and what is involved in the task before us. Yet, the text quoted above stands out, more because of the contrast of ideas presented. A goad is used to keep oxen moving and going in the correct direction. A nail is used to immobilize or secure so that what is being anchored cannot move.

Both of these ideas describe our responsibility in relation to the flock we are in charge of. What is interesting is the nature of the two objects.

A goad – I thought that this was a small stick or whip used to strike an animal when it misbehaved. This is far from what a goad looked like and how it functioned. The goad of the Bible was 8 feet long. It had an iron point on one end and a flat metal plate at the other. It was long enough so that the person directing the animals plowing could do so while following from behind and not impede their forward motion. A simple poke would keep them moving forward and following the correct track. The flat metal part on the other end was used to clean the plow and so facilitate the continued work of the oxen.

A nail – A nail has so many functions. It can be as large as a peg to anchor a tent in place to provide protection. And it can be very small serving to hold two objects together. It can also be used to support objects on a wall, like a jacket, a picture or food (dried corn). But in each case the idea is that it is driven so well that it will not be moved.

So why place them in the same sentence.

Consider this idea. When working with oxen there is a need to anchor the harness or yoke to the oxen. It must be done in such a way that it will not

come loose, be flexible enough to allow movement, and yet strong enough to handle the force of two oxen pulling a plow. With the proper harness or yoke it becomes easy to use the goad to direct the oxen and keep the plow clean.

This image allows us to see the relationship between the two concepts. There is a need to have anchors that hold life together (a harness or yoke). They give us the structures required to accomplish key tasks. They connect the various parts, the oxen to the plow, in a way that will allow them to function and yet be flexible. Properly designed and connected the harness, or yoke, facilitates the ability of the one in charge to guide the work without interfering needlessly in the plowing being done, and without impacting negatively the effectiveness of the harness or yoke, which connects the oxen to the plow. The result is that the nail and goad work together to make it possible to plow the field.

We have the same responsibility and the word of God works in the same fashion. God's word provides the anchors we need so that there is no misunderstanding of what we are to do and where we are to carry out the tasks we have been assigned. The anchors are so designed as to avoid unnecessary damage while allowing freedom to act. We have a solid foundation, and a clear understanding of purpose and activity.

God's word, like the goad, also keeps us on track and moving forward. Paul uses the idea of the prize set before him as a personal goad to keep himself moving (Philippians 3:14). He also frequently uses the phrase "stand firm" to describe how Christians should live and depend on God's word (Ephesians 6:14; Philippians 4:1).

We have this task as pastors. We are to make sure those we lead are securely anchored in the truth, like a well-driven nail. We are to make it possible for them to function in the world and carry out their purpose. It is like a house. There are many nails. The nails hold the walls in place and define the function and activity in every part of the house. If the walls were not securely in place then we could never safely enter the house and make use of its resources. The word of God is the nail that we need to define our lives and activity.

We are to also make sure that those we lead receive the guidance they need to successfully carry out the work they have been given. A goad is used to direct the oxen in plowing the field. This is done so that the land can be prepared to receive the seed. We are to direct our people and make sure they stay on track. At the same time we are to take care of anything that might hinder their progress in the work. Much like the flat side of the goad used to clean the plow, our teaching and involvement must help



clear away obstacles and anything that hinders the work of spreading the gospel (Paul describes this as removing any stumbling block (2 Corinthians 6:3).

Working together, the goad and the nail make it possible to correctly and successfully do the work. So do you have any goads or nails in your toolbox? The journey is about preparing the field, planting the seed, and reaping the harvest. Take the time to evaluate if you are providing the nails that anchor others in the truth, and the goads that keep others going in the direction God has called us to go.

## The Journey - Day 36 - Casting Bread

*Ecc 11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.*

Are you ready to soak some bread in water? How long do you think your bread will last before it disintegrates? Can you get the bread back after it has disintegrated? How is it even possible to get it back many days later if it is impossible to recover after a few minutes?

This is only one of several interesting thoughts in the first six verses of this chapter.

*Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come.*

Does this make sense? Should I really give away my resources when there exists the real possibility of disaster and a need to stockpile water, food and other items?

*If the clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth.*

Do you know when a cloud is full of water? How many times have you seen clouds, dark clouds, pass by and not rain? Then how many times have you seen only a few clouds and it rains? How often have we created our idea of what should happen and when it should happen?

*Where a tree falls, there it will lie.*

Do trees move themselves after falling? How often do we spend time wishing things were different? How often does that desire prevent us from dealing with the reality that is before us? How often are we unhappy with the results and so give up?

*Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.*

How often do we wait for something specific before we decide to take action? How often do we delay the work in the belief that there is a perfect day coming to do it? How often do we miss an opportunity to do what needs to be done because we are looking for something else to do?

The next verse puts the others in perspective.

*As you don't know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God.*

Are we trying to control God? Are we expecting Him to listen and obey us? Are we telling God that we know better and are wiser than He is when it comes to trusting him; not worrying about the results, obeying his word, doing the work before us, not waiting until we are ready?

Verse 6 tells us to get busy.

*Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.*

This journey is about taking risks, not waiting for the right conditions. It is about dealing with the real world and real people. It is about doing the work and not waiting for something better or for someone else to decide when to take action. It is about trusting that God will work according to his plan, not mine.

This means that we get busy. Don't wait for later in the day, for another day or another season. Begin now to plant the seeds of truth in the lives of others. And just because it doesn't seem like the right time (in the evening) keep on planting. Our job is not to produce the results. It is to plant the seed we have been given. It is to do the work of giving away the blessing we have, of receiving God in our lives.

This brings us full circle to the first phrase. Cast your bread on the water. This may appear like a foolish act to the world, but in the kingdom of God it is the wisest thing a person can do. It declares clearly our confidence in God and our decision to not depend on the wisdom of the world. The act of giving, and then giving more reveals our knowledge that the greatest disaster that lies ahead does not relate to lack of food, lack of water, or loss of life. The biggest disaster waiting for all of us is to enter eternity and lose our soul. Jesus made this very clear,

*“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mk 8:36).*

Risking it all, throwing bread on water, is the only way to gain what is of true value. We are promised that if we do so we will find it again. No, actually, the what the writer says that it will come back to us. Risking our life opens the way to receive more than we risked. Consider carefully the words of Jesus in John 12:24-26.

*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

This journey is essential. It is about risking everything. It does not let anything interfere with our continued progress. It gives so that others will join us in this journey. It does not focus on the rocks, rivers and obstacles that lie in our path, but keeps our eyes on Jesus, the author of our faith and our companion on the journey. The journey does not worry about how we may benefit but how our action will benefit others.

So, are you ready to throw your bread on the water and keep throwing it until God brings the harvest?

## **The Journey - Day 37 - Negative Thinking**

*Zec 11:17 "Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!"*

So often the picture of the shepherd in the books of the prophets is very negative. In fact the majority of the passages involve judgment and condemnation. Yet we must not avoid dealing with them because we can learn critical lessons that will guide us in avoiding the repetition of those mistakes.

The eleventh chapter of Zechariah focuses on various attitudes and actions that cause a shepherd to be condemned.

*Vs 3 – Listen to the wail of the shepherds; their rich pastures are destroyed*

These are selfish shepherds. They feel that the purpose of the flock is to provide them with what they need. The description in vs 5 is graphic. They slaughter the sheep and do not spare them. The flock exists for their benefit, nothing more. In fact they would rather have money than deal with caring for the flock. To end the contract for caring for the sheep required the payment of 30 pieces of silver. This also happens to be the price paid for the betrayal of Jesus. The leaders and members of the Sanhedrin paid this to escape their responsibility and judgment. They did not care about the sheep (the people). They only saw them as a way of maintaining their lifestyle and Jesus was making this impossible.

Each time we see the church as a means to an end other than what God desires we become the selfish shepherds. We will even betray members of the church if that will allow us to get what we want and avoid doing what God wants.

*Vs 15 – Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd.*

The foolish shepherd wants everyone to believe they are worthy to be called a shepherd. They act like they have all the tools to do the job, but everything they do is evidence that they have no idea what they are doing. Their equipment is an illusion and they don't care for the lost. They may not even know how to identify who is lost and who is not. They certainly have no interest in searching for them and doing the work involved in caring for them. They do not pay attention to the young. The young are weak and not able to do much of value. Besides, it takes a lot of work to care for the young, the children and adolescents among us. Instead the foolish shepherds focuses on the adults who can do what they ask of them, if only they knew what they wanted them to do.

This shepherd doesn't take care of the sick and injured. Like the young, it takes too much effort and provides so little benefit. And when it comes to healthy adults, he makes the erroneous assumption that adults can provide for themselves. The goal is to do as little as possible yet gain as much benefit as possible, but this is the action of a fool. So many proverbs deal with this type of foolish living (Pr 12:15; 14:12; 26:16) and the damage it will do. If the sheep have even a little wisdom they will abandon such a shepherd. And if this happens, the foolish shepherd will mourn the loss but have no idea why they have abandoned him.

*Vs 17 – Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock.*

The worthless shepherd runs at the first sign of trouble. He avoids conflict, avoids risk, and avoids any form of discomfort. Jesus calls him the hired shepherd (John 10:12-13). This person has no concern for the sheep. The job simply represents a chance to be paid. There is no sense

of ownership, which means the sheep have no value in the shepherd's eyes. The moment trouble comes he abandons the sheep without remorse. He will only do the work as long as there is no risk, it doesn't cause too much inconvenience, and the personal cost is not too high. Or he may stay if the pay is sufficient to warrant a little inconvenience, but definitely nothing that would represent personal loss of any kind.

Ouch!

Let me ask you this. Have you seen pastors who act like any of these?

Selfish - Pastors who treat the church as their little kingdom to rule as they please. Pastors who think that the church owes them a living. Pastors who use the sheep for personal gain and benefit.

Foolish – Pastors who have no idea what they are doing. Pastors who do not take care of their church. Pastors who have no idea what is happening with their members. Pastors who only do just enough to satisfy the minimal requirements of their contract. (To them their work is not a mission, it is only a contract.)

Worthless – Pastors who change churches every time there is a problem. Pastors who allow their church to be damaged by false teaching. Pastors who blame the sheep and not themselves when things are not functioning. Pastors who are in need of being rescued instead of working to rescue others. (Truthfully this pastor may be the one causing the church's problem but runs away before anyone can discover the truth.)

Zechariah provides us with critical admonitions to consider as pastors and leaders. This journey is challenging; it can be exhausting. It can become easy to get lazy and slip into the patterns and habits of any one of these three. Being forewarned can help us when we encounter opposition on the journey; or when we are just tired and think how easy it would be to stop, and relax in the belief that we have done enough. That concept is dangerous and opens the door to these three attitudes.

Be encouraged, continuing the journey will be worth the effort. We don't have to settle for anything less than God's best. Look forward.

*Zec 13:1 On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.*

Be the faithful shepherd. Bring cleansing and forgiveness. Be ready for the struggle. Be prepared for battle. Because in the end, you will be a channel of healing and forgiveness for others.

## The Journey - Day 38 - The Shepherd

*Jn 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

Dealing with the negative behavior of bad shepherds is difficult. But dealing with the description of the GOOD shepherd can be even more stressful. This is because it is not hard to look better than those who misbehave or fail. We can look good by simply avoiding the errors of others. It is always easier to succeed when the person before us was a failure.

To look good becomes a bigger challenge when the person we follow did a good job or when we are trying to live up to a standard set by others. How much more when the standard is set by God and is fulfilled by the Son of God. It would be easy to decide that living up to such a standard is an impossible task and let someone with more skill than us make the attempt. But are we really expected to be like Jesus and fulfill the role of shepherd as he describes it?

We can't answer that question if we don't take a moment to review the standard that is being set for us as shepherds.

1. The sheep listen to his voice. Vs 3
2. The watchman opens the gate for the shepherd. Vs 3
3. He calls the sheep and leads them out Vs 3
4. He goes ahead of them and they follow him, because they know his voice Vs 4
5. The sheep will use him to go and come and find pasture Vs 9
6. He lays down his life for his sheep Vs 11
7. He knows his sheep and they know him Vs 14
8. He sees the other sheep that must be brought in Vs 16
9. They hear his voice Vs 16

There are three more points that no pastor can fulfill them. Just for reference, here they are:

1. He is the gate and those who enter through him will be saved. Vs 9
2. He lays down his life and takes it up again. Vs 17-18
3. The Father knows him the way he knows the Father. Vs 15

As we review the first list, do you see anything in that list that you cannot do? Anything that you cannot learn to do or improve your ability to succeed in doing?

1. Each of us can communicate and learn to be effective and clear in our communication. The key is making sure what we say is in agreement with the words and life of the Good Shepherd.
2. Each of us can learn how to be recognized by the Watchman of the gate (God). To become identifiable as a shepherd of God's sheep.
3. Each of us knows how to invite people to join us in finding the lost and lead them into the world. This is based on our ability to do so ourselves and set an example for those we have been assigned to care for. As we learn to respond to the voice of those responsible for leading us, others will gain confidence in our ability to lead them and so respond when we call them to go out into the world.
4. We can learn to be in the front. We can be an example to others, an example they want to follow. Our lives, our actions, match the words we speak and they learn to trust our voice.
5. We can learn where the good pasture is. Our knowledge, gained from the study of God's word (pasture) will become a guide so that others will find the same source of strength and peace.
6. We can sacrifice ourselves for others. We can be a source of life and help when it is needed.
7. We can know the people of our church. We can learn about their strengths and weaknesses, their goals and needs. And in that process they will learn who we are and of our love for the Good Shepherd.
8. We can see those who are outside of the church and their need to become part of God's family. We can go to them and bring them in.
9. As we go our people will learn to trust us, hear our words, and encounter the person who makes our words trustworthy.

We are not the Good Shepherd, but we can be good shepherds. We are not the Good Shepherd but we can lead others to Him. We are not the Good Shepherd but by walking with him we can learn to fill the role of a good shepherd for those we are called to serve and called to reach. That is the mission. That is where the journey will take us.

## **The Journey - Day 39 - Shepherd's Tools**

*Heb 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the*

*sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

This passage has caused me to stop and think about the word equip. We all want to be equipped. We all need to be equipped. God wants to equip us and make sure we understand how to be equipped. We understand the goals listed above. That we have all the tools we need to do his will and that he will be able to create in and through us what is pleasing to him.

That being said, what is this verse all about?

My first thought was to consider the idea of the equipment of a shepherd. The bible mentions a few, the rod, the staff, and ointment. It also mentions the sheepfold with its gate as important in doing the work of a shepherd. Tools are useful, knowing what tools are available is helpful, but more important is to be equipped in their use. Not only that, but knowing the process by which we become equipped and capable of using them.

Here is an example of what I mean. I love to work with wood and build furniture. I have learned to do many things with only a few key tools. I have also learned that adding key tools makes the work easier and helps improve my skills in producing good work, work that is pleasing. But each time I obtain a new tool I must enter into a process of learning how to use that tool and its applications.

There are many ways to learn how to use a tool.

1. We work with and watch others using these tools. As pastors we have had many such opportunities. We watched our pastor before we became a pastor. We watch other pastors and learn from what they are doing. We participate in ministry and learn from others. This is called apprenticeship or discipling.
2. We read the manual. We all have the manual. It is called the Bible. It is filled with information on how to use the tools God has given us as pastor. This manual is unique in that it is the key tool for our work and it is the manual for its use.
3. We learn by trial and error; a timeless reality. Many of us do not take the time to read the manual or watch others. We simply start working and in the process learn what can and cannot be done. Life is often like that. There are no manuals for many situations. What others have done may not even relate to what we are dealing with. Life is unique and the ability to take risks and get started is part of every process.



4. We watch videos. We can go online and see how to use a woodworking tool. In the same way, as pastors, we can use videos and such resources to see what others are doing in areas like evangelism and discipleship and then repeat the process. The key is, we need to see the concept or idea in use, in order to properly use it.
5. We can take classes. My son is an industrial arts teacher. He teaches students how to use tools. Many technical schools offer classes in the use of such tools. Likewise, we can attend seminars and classes that will give us instructions and guidance in doing the work of a pastor. Actually many of us have gone through the process of attending a training program for the purpose of becoming a pastor. But, we should always be open to more training and equipping, to do our job more effectively.

So how does the Great Shepherd equip us for our work? To answer this, consider these two ideas.

1. We have been promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He will help us understand what we need to understand, fill in the blanks in our knowledge, provide key skills and gifts to do the work, and keep us connected to the Great Shepherd.
2. God will use all of the processes listed above to varying degrees to equip us. He does this because each of us is different. Some learn best through a class, others are great observers, some learn best by trial and error, a hands on approach and so on. Every one of us is unique. We each learn best using different processes of being equipped.

That is the blessing of God's process of equipping. It is designed specifically for each person. It is not about what equipment may or may not be available. It is about being properly equipped to do the work with the tools we have in hand and in whatever situation we find ourselves.

The focus here is not on the equipment or the type of preparation. It is on asking God to properly equip us so that the work we do will be pleasing to him. That is the focus of this passage. It is not about specific tools, specific training. It is about asking God to give us the tools we need and train us so that we will use them to do his will and the work we do will be pleasing to him.

How well do you know yourself and how you learn? What tools do you have in your toolbox? Are you getting the training you need in how to use them correctly, so that you will produce the best work possible?

Have you collected tools that you really don't need and are more of a distraction than helpful in serving in the kingdom of God?

Stop and look at what you have, the time you devote to letting God equip you and if something needs to change so that you can do his will and produce what is pleasing to him in your life and in those you serve. Having the right tools and right training will make the journey easier and help us to reach the final destination.

## The Journey - Day 40 - the Noble Task

*1Ti 3:1 If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.*

To start with here is a basic definition of the word noble. It involves having values that people admire and having or showing high moral principles and ideals. This word noble creates three interesting images. Two of them relate to a type of person. The third relates to a type of lifestyle.

First people of the nobility who live a privileged life. They have everything they want and people to take care of all of their needs and desires. Secondly, nobility refers to knights in shining armor. These are men who serve the needs of others, defend the weak against the oppressor. They willingly sacrifice their lives to protect the rights of others. Thirdly, the word reminds us of the noble task, which is often called a quest. This is a long and arduous search for something. Usually the results will benefit not only the person who is on the quest but for others as well.

It is interesting that we can find scriptures that reflect all three of these images.

Titus 1:11 describes the first. Those who serve only “for the sake of dishonest gain.” Paul and Peter expand the idea in Philippians 1:17; 2 Peter 2:1-3. Paul explains that they do so out of selfish ambition and rivalry, trying to gain prominence. Peter states that these people will exploit others to obtain what they want and to maintain what they have gained.

The second idea of a knight in shining armor committed to serving and caring for others can easily be found in Paul's two descriptions of a pastor found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The pastor is a person others can admire for their qualities and service. They are people that can be

entrusted with the work of God. They follow the message, the gospel (knight's code of conduct) as it was given, and they encourage others to follow it.

The third idea, that of the noble task, quest, of the pastor is described in Ephesians 4:11b-12, "some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." The quest is simple and clear, do all you can to use the gifts and skills you have been given to provide what others need in order to join you in the noble task, of serving God.

Before we continue we do need to make it clear that not all nobles are selfish and self-centered. It is possible to have a high social status and live a noble life. The original concept of nobility focused more on their responsibility to care for those under their protection. Over time this meaning has been lost or distorted because of many who chose to ignore this and use their position to use their subjects for personal gain.

As we consider the concept of noble it will quickly be clear that the focus is on service given on behalf of others. The list of qualities represents a person who has adopted a specific lifestyle so that the pastor (noble person) can encourage and serve others (Titus 1:9), and avoid bringing disgrace to himself and those the pastor serves (1 Ti 3:6).

The second passage in Ephesians explains the nature of the quest, the noble task and reveals why the list of qualities is not just important but essential. This noble task involves preparing God's people for works of service, building up the body, creating unity and maturity so that each person can experience the fullness of Christ in their lives (the purpose of the quest, noble task).

In order to successfully accomplish the quest the pastor must have the ability to make personal sacrifices that will allow him to develop those qualities that represent being noble. He must see the value of making the quest a priority in his life, making important decisions when needed and then making the benefits they gain available to others. They realize that they are the means by which others will understand what is noble and how to become involved in the quest as well.

To be a noble person requires a profound understanding of humility. They understand the meaning of 'the first shall be last and the last first.' They understand why children, and being like children, opens the way to be the greatest in the kingdom. They understand Jesus' comment that he

came to serve, to give his life as the ransom (Mt 20:28). They understand what it means to be like their master (Mt 10:25).

This is humbling and this is what attracts others. A noble task involves a clear understanding that the only thing of true value we have to offer others is our relationship to Christ. When people see Christ in us, like a good student becomes a reflection of his teacher, we are able to be a noble person and do the noble task.

To be a pastor (overseer) is to be both a true noble, and to do what is noble.

Pause and reflect on the two descriptions of the noble pastor and the passage that describes the noble action.

There is not enough time to review all that is contained in these passages and your review cannot be done within the time frame of this study. To be truly noble is the activity of a lifetime. If we accept that quest, to be a true noble, then we can carry out the tasks contained in the passage from Ephesians above. We will prepare our fold for works of service. We will build them up, strengthen them, so that we will be united in our faith. We will help them learn about God and mature in that knowledge. We will help them become all that God intends them to be.

This journey needs noble people willing to be noble, do the noble work, and lead others to God. The journey will open the way for this and gives us the tools we need for all that lies ahead.

## The Journey - Day 41 - Your Will

*Mt 6:9-10 Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

This is one passage that everyone has memorized. It is part of many litanies. We repeat it over and over. So often, that we may have lost sight of its content. So let us pause and reconsider what it in fact means.

The first part speaks of our recognition of God, his supremacy and his holiness. He is in heaven above everything. He holds the exalted position of Creator. the heavens are barely sufficient to function as his throne much less contain his immenseness.

His name is to be treated as holy and used in reverence. This is something that the world, and even the church, is failing to recognize.

For instance, how often do you hear people say ‘Oh my God?’ We are to use his name with respect, realizing that when we do we are not merely using his name, but entering into his presence and calling on him to recognize us and our relationship to him through Jesus.

These two phrases are very clear and easy to understand. It is not hard to consider the Creator as higher than us. It is not hard to understand that God should be treated with respect and that the easiest way to show that respect is in the way we use his name.

But the next two phrases are much different. They are not as easily defined. The term ‘kingdom’ holds a specific meaning for us. Literally it means the territory directly under the authority of a king or government. While we may not use the term, the idea of a sovereign state or country has the same intent. It is a kingdom, it has a governing body, it has rules and so on.

We all live in some form of kingdom. So what does it mean for God’s kingdom to come? This was a common theme in Jesus’ teaching. He used many stories and parables to explain what the kingdom of God (or heaven) was like. He also provided descriptions of relationships and life in this kingdom. A key element in the kingdom is its battle against the usurper Satan, and those who serve him; who are involved in trying to prevent people from becoming part of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is not restricted by physical or political boundaries. It is a spiritual kingdom. Every time someone receives forgiveness they become part of this kingdom and the kingdom comes to earth in that person. When we bring the gospel to people and they respond, then we are making it possible for the kingdom to come. When we pray for the kingdom of God to come, we are praying that the gospel will be preached and people will respond. The complete translation of the Greek here is ‘make your kingdom to exist,’ or ‘bring your kingdom into existence.’

The next phrase is “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We could spend a great deal of time reviewing the will of God. Instead, let us agree on one aspect, that God wants all people to be restored in their relationship with him. This was the purpose of Jesus’ coming. But that is not the complete phrase. The will of God is to exist here as it does in heaven.

So what does God’s will look like in heaven? What does it mean for his will to exist here as it does there?

In heaven everything that God commands, speaks, and desires (his will) is immediately carried out. He spoke and the universe was created. The

angels do not hesitate to carry out his directions. The angels are in constant praise of his name. His judgment is absolute and perfect. His love has no limit, which we see expressed in Jesus. Through Jesus' example we see how God's will functions when there is no hesitation, no doubt. God wants this to be the reality here on earth and wants us to experience it as it exists in heaven.

Jesus' comments in John give us a clear idea of what this means;

- John 6:38 – He came to do the will of him who sent him
- John 7:16 – His teaching came from God
- John 7:29 – God sent him, he came from God (John 8:42)
- John 8:28 – He spoke the words taught him by the Father
- John 8:38 – He revealed what he has seen in God's presence
- John 8:47 – Those who hear him belong to God
- John 10:37 – He did what the Father did
- John 12:22 – He came to glorify the Father's name

This comments can help us see how we are to be involved in making God's will exist here on earth in the same way it is in heaven.

We are to:

- Do the will of the one who sent us
- Give the teaching of God to others
- Reveal that God has called us
- Speak clearly the words we have received from our Father
- Make sure we spend time in God's presence and let others see what this means
- Show, by our lives, that we are hearing God and belong to him
- Do what the Father does. Be Christ-like in our lives, relations, and thoughts.
- Glorify God in everything.

There is not enough time or space to explore what each of these means, especially as it relates to each of us as individuals and to the work we have been given. Take the time to reflect on them one by one and may your life be one that brings the kingdom of God to others and makes God's will supreme on earth.

## The Journey - Day 42 - Daily Bread

*Matthew 6:11 Give us today our daily bread.*

I want to challenge you today to reconsider what this phrase means. For most of us it means, quite simply, the food we need to live for today. But I am beginning to believe it means much more than that. Especially if we keep it in context with the first part of the prayer.

The first part is about honoring God and recognizing his authority over all of creation. The second part is about making sure that the kingdom of God becomes a reality in this world and that his will is carried out on earth in the same way as it is in heaven. If we follow that line of thinking then our daily bread would be the resources we need each day to continue the process of making God's presence and rule a part of our life, and in the lives of those we serve, and the lives of those we are called to seek out and to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God.

There are many scriptures that help us see this truth. I have included a number of them for you to read and meditate on.

*Ps 37:4-6 Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord ; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.*

*Ps 145:19-20 He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.*

*Pr 16:3-4 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The Lord works out everything for his own ends — even the wicked for a day of disaster.*

*Mt 4:4 "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

*Jn 6:32-35 "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said,*

*"from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*

*Jn 15:7-8 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

*Jn 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

*Php 4:5-7 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*1Jn 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him.*

This does not mean we are not to pray for the daily needs for food, health and shelter. But it does mean we are to keep them in perspective and keep them submitted to our service and life in the kingdom of God.

*Mt 6:25-34*

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?<sup>b</sup>*

*"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed*



like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Are you being fed God's daily bread for service in the kingdom?

## The Journey - Day 43 - Forgive

*Mt 6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*Lk 11:4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.*

This is a pivotal idea in the Lord's prayer. It is the central activity in bringing the kingdom of God to earth and revealing the will of God. It is the act of forgiveness. This was the main theme in John's preaching. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3). This was also the focal point of Peter's sermon at Pentecost, that people should repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin (Acts 2:38). Forgiveness is the key step in receiving new life in Christ (Col 2:13).

We all accept this truth. God sent his son to offer forgiveness for our sin. He died on the cross to pay the debt of sin so that we can be forgiven. Everyone who confesses their sin, repents, will be forgiven. But this passage says much more than that. It states that the extent to which we will experience this forgiveness will be impacted by our attitude of forgiveness towards others. In fact this idea is repeated and more forcefully in several other passages.

- *Mt 6:14-15 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

- *Mk 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins*
- *Lk 6:37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*
- *Col 3:13 Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

There is more. This is not just about forgiving our friends, but our enemies as well. It is about love. Forgiving a person reveals our love for them. It is how God expressed his love to us through Christ. God demonstrated his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8). This act of love made possible our forgiveness.

- *Mt 5:44-45 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*
- *Lk 6:35 But love your enemies, do good to them,*
- *Lk 6:27 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,*

Paul describes this as the ministry of reconciliation.

*2 Co 5:18-21 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

We were all enemies of God but he came to us. He chose to forgive us and then chose to call us to proclaim this message to the world. We are called ambassadors of this message. Ambassadors who enter the territory of the enemy to bring the truth and the possibility of reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sin.

In the world there is no forgiveness. People do not consider the possibility of forgiveness, they think in terms of consequences and debts to be repaid. However forgiveness is a foundational principle in the kingdom of God. It is about reconciling. It is about breaking down the walls erected because of sin. And that is done by means of forgiveness.

We have been forgiven and should, no,must, forgive others. Our inability or unwillingness to do so will affect and limit our experience and understanding of

forgiveness. This will in turn affect the ability of the church to function as Christ's representative in the world and will prevent us from being ambassadors to those who have not yet experienced this forgiveness.

This part of the prayer reveals how strongly God feels about reconciling the lost, about providing forgiveness to all. As we receive our daily bread in the kingdom, we are to use those resources to bring forgiveness to others. It is through us that others will learn of forgiveness and discover the forgiveness available because of God's love. This is the ministry of reconciliation.

The wonderful thing about this process is it brings a deeper understanding and appreciation for the forgiveness we have received. May our prayer always be that God send us out to forgive others and draw them into the kingdom of God through this profound expression of love.

## The Journey - Day 44 - Danger

*Mt 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'*

We all know that God does not tempt us; He is not the source of sin, and we all know we have a powerful enemy; an enemy who seeks to destroy us. We are familiar with the scriptures

*Jas 1:13 For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;*

*1Pe 5:8 Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

We are also aware of key scriptures given to help us deal with both.

*1Co 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

*Lk 10:19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*

But as we consider this in the context of the Lord's prayer and kingdom, we see a deeper purpose in this passage.

Lead us not. In the Greek, the idea of lead is to cause someone to enter into a particular event or state.

Temptation. A place of trial and testing.

In considering what this means we need to remember that the goal of this prayer is the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. With that in mind this request could be stated as 'do not allow me to be brought back into the kingdom of earth, trapped once again in the ways and thinking of the world. Do not allow me to be once again be attracted by its ideas and offer of truth and freedom, which is false.' Strengthen me against the temptation to go back like a dog to its vomit (Pr 26:11) or a pig to its mud ( 2 Pe 2:22).

Deliver. Break the chains that have bound us to sin.

Evil (evil one). The enemy of our soul and all that is true. The one who tries to keep us bound to our sin and seeks our eternal destruction.

Within the context of the kingdom this could be translated to mean 'keep me safe from his attacks. Help me to experience fully the freedom you have promised now. Keep me safe until I arrive in your presence and am freed eternally from the attacks of Satan and am freed from the last enemy, death.

These are crucial concepts. They reveal that God is not just working at setting up his heavenly kingdom but is fully prepared to take care of all those who are in the kingdom while they are still on earth, and to do so until they arrive into his presence. By these words we are encouraged to seek his power and resources to keep ourselves safe from all attack. This may mean protection from such attack or God providing the strength needed to overcome whatever trial or temptation may be used to attack us.

*Mt 16:18 on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

*Jn 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

*1Jn 5:4-5 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

*Ro 8:37-39 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels*

*nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Our task is not impossible. We are part of a kingdom of overcomers; of victors. We have the privilege of inviting others to be a part of this kingdom and joining us in praying, ‘your kingdom come,’ in all of its glory and power. Let them hear clearly from us, the pastors and leaders called by God, that there is nothing that can separate them from the love of God.

## The Journey - Day 45 - Persevere

*Jude 11 Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.*

This does not look like a passage that would encourage us to persevere in our journey. And you would be right. Maybe. Sometimes we need to hear what would happen if we didn't persevere. For this the book of Jude is worth reading. It is not easy to read because it contains dire warnings, warnings about people who began the journey, or at least appeared to be on the journey and then lost their way. Jude lists three issues that are the result of not persevering and losing our way or just stopping. Cain represents doing it my way and not heeding God's direction. Balaam represents doing it for personal gain, no matter what may be sacrificed in the process. Korah represents doing it for the control I will have over the lives of others.

This journey will challenge us at many levels and requires us to persevere. It will require us to examine ourselves in ways we never have before. So a couple of questions need to be asked. Are you growing weary? Are you feeling a bit overwhelmed by all that is happening around you?

If you are, it is not surprising. This is not a simple journey. It is not a pleasant walk in a lovely garden. It is a journey taken through difficult terrain. A journey that tasks the very core of who we are and will test the limits of our strength and endurance. It is filled with pitfalls, dangerous

bridges, and precipices. It is not for the fainthearted or timid. But the reward that awaits us at the completion of the journey is beyond value.

The focus today as pastors is on persevering; how to keep moving forward and not fall into the traps and dead ends that could cause us to consider surrendering and stopping short of the destination. Short of all that has been promised to us, to those we lead, and to those we will reach.

*Heb 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*

*Tit 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

*1Ti 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

There are three keys in these verses that will help us in persevering. Keeping them in focus will keep our eyes on the goal and keep our feet moving.

The will of God. This is more than just knowing what God wants. It is about knowing God. You cannot know what a person truly wants you to do until you truly understand the person. This is true in marriage, in our friendships, and even more so in our relationship with God. The more time we spend with God and developing that relationship the easier it is to understand his will. The better we understand his will the sooner we will understand what he has promised and will see those promises take effect in our lives.

The trustworthy message. Every relationship contains a message and is based on what we learn about another person. A true relationship becomes a message that is visible for others to see. It will begin to reveal to others what the relationship is, what its value is and how others are to respond to and can benefit from the relationship. Marriage works this way. It starts as a friendship between two people. In time, it becomes something deeper. This will lead to choices that everyone sees as the basis for a permanent relationship, marriage. Even within the marriage there will continue to be development of the relationship as it includes

children, in-laws, and then grandchildren. At each point the message of relationship is evident to those around this couple.

Our message, is in fact, a relationship with God revealed to everyone who comes in contact with us. This revelation is communicated through our actions, decisions, objects, and events which help people understand and become part of that relationship. It is a relationship that will encourage others and build the foundation for them to desire the same in their lives.

Our life and doctrine. Our message is filled with structure. This structure gives clarity to the purpose of our life. Doctrine is what gives our faith structure and helps us understand how to live. It helps us develop a strong relation with God which has a clear purpose and function. The better we understand our beliefs the better we can become an example to others. Structure produces confidence and an ability to live so others can see why we believe in God. People who walk and live confidently attract others.

Perseverance is built on these three ideas. We have a God who has chosen to reveal himself. He has chosen to make his will clear to us. When we know what we are to do, it is easier to persevere. We have a message that is for everyone and reveals the opportunity to have a relationship with God. When we know what God has said to us and his desire for us to understand, we are encouraged to persevere in learning the message. We have a structure that shows us how to live and what God wants us to do. Each step we take, each time we persevere, we learn more of God's promises and provisions.

Keep your focus on the path. Others will join you. Persevere and God will bless you in all you do.

## The Journey – Day 46 – Known

*Rv 3:8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

We are getting closer to our destination. About now we can start feeling pretty good about all we have done and learned on the journey. So this is a good time to remind ourselves about a few things.

God knows everything that has happened on the journey. He knows that, truthfully speaking, you could not make such a journey on your own. It is much more than we are capable of and without his presence and sustaining power we would not be where we are. He wants us to be honest about who we are and what we really are capable of doing.

This was the point of the message to the church at Philadelphia. Of all the letters to the churches, this the only one that is truly positive. There is no criticism, no judgment like we find in the other letters. Yes, many of those churches had done great things but found themselves depending on their own wisdom and strength. This decision left them vulnerable to attack and to errors, from within and without.

In the case of the Philadelphia church we learn some interesting truths that are important as we finish this phase of the journey. Yes, this phase. You didn't honestly think that once you made it to Pentecost you were done? Remember this journey is about getting ready for what God has planned for us. It is about being ready for God to work in our lives, through our lives and through those we reach and teach.

So what do we learn from the church in Philadelphia?

1. God knew their deeds. Vs 8
2. God chose to open a great door of opportunity for them. Vs 8
3. God knew they had little strength and resources. Vs 8
4. God knew they had kept their eyes on him and trusted in him. Vs 8
5. God knew they had endured patiently and obediently. Vs 10

For this they would receive

1. Protection in the coming trial. Vs 10
2. Honor in the eyes of others. Vs 9
3. Be built into the temple. Vs 12
4. Receive a new name from God. Vs 12

God knew their deeds, their faithfulness. He gave them an opportunity to serve because he knew they would depend on him for their strength. He knew that through everything they had kept their focus on God. God knew that they would not falter in the face of the challenge. For this He promised His protection when they encountered trials and opposition. He



promised that he would make them an example to others of what is possible when we are faithful and depend on God and not ourselves. He promised them a special place and name as a reward and encouragement to continue on the path they had followed.

We, as pastors, have come this far because of God's presence and care for us on the journey. For those of us who are seeing this truth there are doors of opportunity waiting for us. For those of us who are seeing the struggle as an opportunity to understand more about depending on God and not ourselves, we will become a beacon to others on the journey. For those of us who have let God lift us up when we are tired and discouraged there will be power to face the trials that will come.

This church may have appeared weak, limited, and unknown. But it is this church that is honored. In its weakness it found the power of God. In its limitations it learned of the vast resources of God. In its anonymous existence it found honor in being identified with God.

This is the journey we are working to complete. We may finish the journey at one level, personal accomplishment, and lose much at another level, learning what God is trying to teach us. If that happens then who will want to join us? If they do join us because of our personal strength and determination, what type of follower of Christ will they become? But if we complete the journey fully aware of our dependence on God, we will attract others. We will reveal the true purpose of the journey, of learning to walk in dependence on God.

What are you learning about yourself and your relationship to God?

What will you communicate to others about journeying with God?

What kind of door will God place before you? Will it be based on your strength and deeds; on confidence of what you can do? Or. Will your journey allow God to produce in you eternal results? Will the door be filled with God's presence and provision? Will it attract others to follow God as you are following God?

## The Journey – Day 47 – Straining

*Php 3:13-14 But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Forget everything you have done for the past 46 days. The truth is, no journey focuses on where you started but where you are when you finish. The value of the journey is not only defined by how far or how long it is, but where you are going. Does that sound a bit confusing? But is it not true of much of our life? We spend years in the journey of education, so that we can get a job. We spend years in the journey of raising children, hoping they will make us proud. We spend a great effort in journey of training, to succeed in competition.

Some journeys are actually very short, in terms of distance, but can take large amounts of time and energy. Repairing a damaged relationship may only require you to step across the room. But to cover that distance, for some is almost impossible.

As you come to the end of this journey, what have you learned about where you started and where you will be when you finish? Paul in chapter 3 of Philippians gives us many clues about what we must keep in focus, what we must maintain as the priority.

*Php 3:7-8 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

Compare what you hoped to gain with what you really have gained. What have you learned about the presence of Christ in your life and as your companion on this journey? How will that information guide you into the journeys God has prepared for you that are yet before you?

*Php 3:10-11 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Have you grown in your knowledge of Christ? A key purpose of this journey is learning who Christ is. Jesus spent a great deal of time reviewing the prophets teachings and all they said about him with the disciples. He then spent time reviewing his life and teaching with them as well. What have you learned about his life and walking in fellowship with him? Are you becoming more like him in this life? How has that prepared you to meet him in eternity? How will what you have learned help others to do the same?

*Php 3:12-13 I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

Jesus came to earth to meet us. He died to save us. He lives to walk with us. Why did Jesus do all of this? If Jesus did all of that for us, then what will it mean for us to do the same for others? To go to them, to sacrifice for them, to walk among them. Will they understand what it is we are doing and why?

*Php 3:14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

What is the prize? Paul was called to proclaim the gospel to everyone he could. Each place he traveled to presented the same opportunity, to win the greatest prize possible, that of another soul saved from an eternity separated from God. What have you learned about the prize God has called you to seek out? How are you pressing on to gain that prize? How has the journey helped you understand what you are to do?

*Php 3:16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

What have you attained in this journey? What does it mean for you to live up to what you have already been given? Every one of us is at a different place in this journey, is being called to a different ministry, and will be given skills according to where we are and what will we be doing. It is not about what you have, but about our willingness to use what we have been given. The destination is the same in that respect, our ability to fully use all that we have been given. But what our destination will look like is as different as the people on the journey, and the places where the journey takes place.

*Php 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ*

And yes, there is a final goal. A final journey. We are not citizens of this world. Our final destination is where our true citizenship is, in the kingdom of God. Our Savior has prepared a place for us. He is leading us step by step so that we and all those who join us will be reunited together in heaven. Are we straining, urging ourselves and others forward towards that great day?

*Php 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*

## **The Journey - Day 48 - Cloud**

*Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

As you come to the final stretch in the journey. As in all races there is a crowd waiting at the finish line. Actually, there is a crowd that has been watching us since we began the race. If we are like any competitor, we have two things on our mind; reaching the finish line and wondering who is watching and waiting for us. If we are doing well we hope that we will be seen by those who are famous or are well-known and respected for their opinion. We hope that our friends are there to encourage us in the last part of the race and to see us finish. More than anything we want to be congratulated for completing the race and recognized for doing our best.

My son recently completed a triathlon. His wife and some friends were there to watch him. They wanted to encourage him and found various places along the way where they could see him and he could see them. Then they raced ahead to watch him as he finished the race. They were excited as he crossed the line. As he told us about the race he talked about places on the race where he felt isolated and alone. At one point he and another competitor ran together and encouraged each other. They watched out for each other. He talked about what it felt like to know

people who cared about him were watching and waiting for him. He talked about how he felt when he finished the race. He was not in front. He was not in the back. But he had reached his goal of finishing the race.

We have a cloud of witnesses watching us. The writer of Hebrews lists some of the great people who have run this race, who have been on the journey before us. We all know them by name. But I want to share with you another list of names. A list of people less known but who completed the journey that God had marked out for them. They finished the journey and form the majority of the cloud of witnesses and they are waiting for us to join them at the end of the journey.

- Bezalel – Moses may have drawn the plans for the tabernacle but Bezalel built the temple.
- Medad – He was one of the 72 elders chosen to help Moses govern the people of Israel.
- Young armor bearer – He went, unarmed, and helped Jonathan attack the enemy.
- Joseph – He accepted the risk of marrying a pregnant virgin with a fabulous story.
- Elkanah – He allowed his wife to dedicate Samuel to the service of God.
- Obadiah – He risked his life to feed and protect 100 prophets against the will of King Ahab.
- Barzillai – He provided critical resources to David when David was fleeing from Absalom.
- Purah – He helped Gideon destroy the altar of the false god Baal.
- Jaharh – He helped supervise the work of restoring the temple during the reign of Josiah.
- Nicolas – One of the seven chosen to wait on tables in the early church.
- Conaniah – He managed the storerooms of the temple in the days of Hezekiah.
- Handmaid – She convinced Naaman, the enemy general, to go to Elisha to be healed.
- Joanna – She was one of the women who cared for Jesus during his ministry.
- Puah – She was a midwife who refused to kill the newborn boys during the reign of Pharaoh.
- Boy – His five loaves and two fish fed 5000 men and more.

- Children – They proclaimed the truth of the Messiah’s arrival in Jerusalem.

This list of names could go on. There are hundreds, maybe thousands of names listed in the bible. They represent only a small quantity of the people who have faithfully journeyed where God placed them. They are those who obediently served, who believed in what God was doing. Their willingness to complete the journey marked out for them, in many cases, was used by God to accomplish great things. Their service was crucial to what God was doing.

Why do we need to see this?

Because all too often we lose sight of what this race is all about. We get caught up in the desire to be seen as great in the kingdom. We find ourselves wanting to be recognized, seen by those we consider important and receive their praise. When, actually, what is more important is what our family, our friends, and our church see what is happening in and through us. These are the people who see us and know what we have sacrificed to run the race. They are the ones who will benefit from what we have learned on the journey.

I find it interesting that the Scripture uses the concept of a cloud of witnesses and not a group of witnesses. A cloud is made up of millions, billions of droplets of water. A cloud, on occasion, may produce a bolt of lightning, which for a moment will light the way. But it is more likely to produce rain, the showering of those millions of droplets of water on the earth, and even after they have fallen there are millions still waiting. Waiting to fall, waiting to bless others by their presence.

The cloud of witnesses is there to encourage us. Encourage us to be what God has intended us to be. Encourage us to take the journey marked out for us. Encourage us to run the race with all our strength until we cross the finish line. Encourage us because when we finish we will become part of the cloud of witnesses for all who wish to join us in the journey. We will become part of the cloud of witnesses of what God accomplishes in those who choose to journey with God.

## The Journey – Day 49 – Upper Room

*Ac 1:14 Todos, en un mismo espíritu, se dedicaban a la oración, junto con las mujeres y con los hermanos de Jesús y su madre María.*

You have made it. You have arrived at the upper room of Acts chapter 1. Others are here with you. All are waiting. All are praying. Each person's journey has been unique to them. They have struggled with different obstacles, barriers, and weaknesses. Now that you are here what are you expecting to happen?

Are you looking for an incredible moment? An incredible display of God's power? Something that will be the mountaintop experience that everyone talks about and that you may be seeking as confirmation of the value of your sacrifice and commitment? ...Or...are you ready for disappointment in relation to your expectations?

Now why would I say that?

Consider with me what happened to others who were sent on a journey by God.

- Moses – He was sent into the wilderness to follow sheep around for forty years. He was met by God in a burning bush and then sent on another journey that would last an additional forty years.
- Elijah – He was sent on a journey of 40 days. He expected to see a great display of power but met God in a still small voice. He was then sent back to continue his work and appoint a successor.
- Isaiah – He was called to serve God. When he received his vision of heaven it forced him to his knees in confession of his sin before he could continue the journey.
- John the Baptist – He was sent to the desert to do his work. There he prepared the way for the Messiah.
- Naaman – He had to listen to a child. His journey resulted in having to bathe seven times in the muddy Jordan before he was healed.
- David – His journey forced him to go into hiding for a number of years. He could not move forward until the king and his best friend died.

- Jeremiah – His journey was filled with sorrow as he watched what happened to his people as they refused to hear his message.
- Abraham – He left his home and family and lived as a stranger, a nomad in a foreign land. He never received the land promised, only the message that through him the land would be blessed.
- Noah – He was sent on a journey to build an ark. He preached 100 years and only his family was saved.
- James – He was called as a disciple; chosen as one of the inner three. He was the first to be martyred.

God called each of them to a journey. First, a journey of preparation. Then, a journey of service. Each of them came to a specific point, an upper room if you will, a place where they met with God to receive encouragement and direction. That meeting was designed specifically for the person and the situation. The only thing that is the same is that the person met God and that meeting changed their lives and the lives of people around them.

You have finally come to the end of the journey. You are standing at the finish line, the upper room. God is there and he will meet you. He is there to tell you that the end of one journey is merely the beginning of the next. He is there to speak to you and show you what is next for you. He may do something wondrous. He may speak softly. He may challenge your thinking and plans. But He will give you a clear message to proclaim. He will open your eyes to who you are and who he is. He will show you what he has been doing and what will be expected of you.

But rarely will he do exactly what you expect, exactly what you want. The journey is to prepare you for what he has for you and wants you to do.

You are in the upper room, Are you ready?

## The Journey – Day 50 – Restart

*Php 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!  
It is no trouble for me to write the same things to  
you again,*

The day has come. The journey is done. It is time to start again.



These 50 days have always been about preparing for the next journey. That is what it was for the disciples. Jesus used his time with them to deepen their understanding of the teaching of the Old Testament and of his life and ministry. Jesus used this time to strengthen and prepare them for what was about to happen to them and to their world. Then they waited to receive the power they needed. Why? So that they could begin the next journey.

They started with a journey that led them to Christ. They spent three years in a journey of learning. The last 50 days they have been on a journey of preparation. Now would begin the journey of service. The journey to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the world.

It is a true fact. The end of one journey is always the beginning point for the next journey. Think about that.

Further, everything learned from the current journey and the ones before it, are what made your current journey possible, and will contribute to what happens in the next journey. Life is a series of journeys, each one adds to the next one. Each one makes the next one possible. Each one provides the information we need to begin again. This involves being able to choose what the next journey will be, when it will be, and what we will choose to do.

That assumes, of course, that we have the ability to control these factors; that we can always select what journeys we will take. But that is not reality. Sickness, loss, disasters, and many more events can suddenly launch us in directions we never expected, on journeys we would never choose. Yet, in all of this there is one aspect of every journey we can control. We can choose who will travel with us on the journey and we can choose who we exclude.

The disciples chose to go where Jesus directed them. They chose to listen to him about the journey they were on and about the journey he was preparing them for. Jesus is always ready to be our companion. He is always capable of reading the map and seeing the directions that mark our path for us. If we keep that in focus then we will be ready to start the next journey. This is why the group gathered in the upper room. They gathered to be ready when God brought their journey of preparation to an end and launched them on the next journey.

That is what Pentecost is. Are you ready for God to launch you? Have you been listening to his instructions? The lost of this world are waiting. Will we accept the journey before us and go where God sends us?

Spend time reflecting on the journey you have completed. Consider what journey God is asking you to make. And start the journey now.