

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible
Reading ■ Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond
the Church

April 1, 2018

Day 1: Luke 24:1

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

They came just after the Sabbath was over at the dawn of the day. They could not prepare the body correctly because Sabbath came too quickly the day Jesus was killed. It was a woman's responsibility to prepare the body so they were the ones that came. It was the women who gave birth and the women who prepared the body after death.

Question: Do you recall the last funeral you went to?

Challenge: Get up early each morning this week and walk for a while. As you walk spend some time in prayer

Scripture: Luke 24-1-35

Day 2: Luke 24:2-3

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

The stone in front of the tomb would have been very heavy. It would normally take a couple of strong men to move a burial stone. It was rolled along a track in front of a tomb. The tombs were cut out of the rock in the side of a hill and were circular. This tomb was unusual because it was dug for just one person. Most tombs were multi-generational family tombs. At this point all they knew was that the body was gone; they did not know how or why or where it went.

Question: What is the heaviest thing you can lift?

Challenge: Would you want to help prepare the body of a loved one for burial?

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-15

Day 3: Luke 24:4-5

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" is a question for us today. Why do people keep pursuing things that bring death, not life? Hate, greed and gluttony all bring death, yet people still look for life in these things. Jesus told us that we need to seek God first and all other things, we need, will be given us.

Question: Can you name some things that bring death, not life, that people still go for?

Challenge: What gives you meaning in life?

Scripture: Mark 16:1-13

Day 4: Luke 24:6-7

He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

The Good News is that Jesus is raised and that we do not serve a dead Lord, but a risen one. The angels remind the women of what Jesus said at various times when He was with them. Many times in life we hear things but until some experience comes along to put meaning to the things we hear we do not really understand them. We know that love gives life but until we experience love we do not really know the truth of that saying.

Question: How good is your memory? Can you recall the first thing you did this morning?

Challenge: How would you explain love to someone that feels unloved?

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Day 5: Luke 24:8-11

Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Now the women recall what Jesus had said about coming again. When He first talked about dying no one wanted to hear it because it was sad news. Now they can hear that Jesus' death was not a victory for evil but just the opposite, it is a victory for God. The power of evil was broken for good on the day of Crucifixion and the proof was seen on the day of Resurrection. In truth the story of the Resurrection seems too much to believe. We need Faith to act on that belief.

Question: Have you ever had the experience of telling something and then not being believed?

Challenge: Think of something that you cannot do right now but that you should do. How can you take steps to do the things you cannot?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-19

Day 6: Luke 24:12

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

It is interesting that Peter also saw that the tomb was empty. His wondering probably took the turn of hope. He had denied Christ and he needed to be forgiven. Peter probably thought that if Jesus rose from the dead Peter could at least tell Him how sorry he was. Peter never got the chance to ask for forgiveness, because just like the Prodigal Son, before Peter could say a word the Lord welcomed him and embraced him. This is how the Grace of God works. Before we can even ask for forgiveness God is ready to forgive us and accept us into the family.

Question: What do you think Peter's thoughts were as he saw the empty tomb?

Challenge: Is there anybody that you need to say something important to? Make a decision to do so.

Scripture: Acts 2:14-36

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April 8, 2018

Day 1: Philemon 1:1-3

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon is most likely the leader of the house church in Colossi. There is a very close relationship between Paul and Philemon. Paul is writing from house arrest in Rome. He emphasizes the fact that he is a prisoner to show how Onesimus, being a slave, is also like a prisoner. Both slaves and prisoners do not have freedom. Paul is forcing Philemon to think about Onesimus, his slave, in a different light.

Question: Why does Paul refer to people as “brother, sister or my child in Christ”?

Challenge: Think about your friends. Which ones are your brother or sister in Christ? Is there someone who you would consider your spiritual father?

Scripture: Colossians 3 and 4

Day 2: Philemon 1:4-7

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

Paul's time in prison is made easier through the faith and prayers of Philemon and the other church members. When Paul is feeling like his work might be in vain he recalls the church, their faith and love, toward the others in the community.

Question: How does Paul know that the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through Philemon?

Challenge: Think back to a time when you felt your work was in vain. How did you deal with that?

Scripture: Philippians 1:26-2:6

Day 3: Philemon 1:8-13

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel;

Onesimus was an escaped slave of Philemon's. He somehow came into Paul's influence and became a Christian. In addition to being a convert, he also became like a son to Paul, taking care of Paul like a son would take care of his father. Paul makes an interesting point - as a non-Christian slave, Onesimus was not a willing servant, but now that he is a Christian he will be a willing servant. The reason Paul can say he could command Philemon is that Paul is (spiritually) Philemon's father. As such he can command Philemon's obedience.

Question: How has Onesimus become useful?

Challenge: If you did not know whether Philemon would treat Onesimus favorably, would you have sent him back?

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Day 4: Philemon 1:14-16

but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

As a runaway slave Onesimus would be open to severe punishment so Paul is trying to mitigate that punishment and at the same time teach about love. Paul wants Philemon to forgive Onesimus, receive him back into the family and treat him as a brother. All of this is to be done willingly, not out of obligation. Paul could demand obedience but he knows that if the actions are done out of love Onesimus, Philemon and the members of the house church will benefit from this practical example of the love of God being shared.

Question: Is Paul asking Philemon to adopt Onesimus?

Challenge: Think back to a time when you experienced real mercy. What happened and what was your response?

Scripture: 2 Kings 11:20-12:9

Day 5: Philemon 1:17-21

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Paul is not sure if there has been any financial loss from Onesimus running away but if there is Paul is willing to pay for it himself. Of course where Paul would get any money is hard to say and in fact, he did not have any but his example of willingness to pay if necessary for someone else shows how Paul does see Onesimus as a son for whom he is responsible. Paul hopes Philemon will see his slave as a brother. If Philemon can make the change from master to brother it will be a living example of God's grace. Philemon has no reason to comply with Paul's request. Similarly, God had no obligation to send Jesus and through Him forgive us our “running away” from God. However, God did forgive us so how can we do any less?

Question: Do you think Paul was serious about making up for any loss Philemon might have suffered or was this just talking?

Challenge: What do you think you owe to God?

Scripture: Mark 9:32-42

Day 6: Philemon 1:22-25

One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you. Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul ends his letter by asking for a place to stay. Paul believes that through prayer, prayer of the members, he can come to visit the congregation at Colossi. We pray for those traveling because they in a sense travel on our prayers.

Question: Do you think Paul ever made it back to see Philemon?

Challenge: Is there something in your life that you feel enslaved to? Ask God to free you from that slavery.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-8

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April 15, 2018

Day 1: II Thessalonians 3.6⁶ Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us.

The basic idea of “living in idleness” is disorder. The idleness is more than not working; it is using the time you should spend at work being involved in activities that cause disorder. These activities are not violent but by the idle persons attitude of not working it causes disorder and confusion among the members of the community. The author is talking about the Christian community not the community at large. It seems that some of the Christians had the notion that the end was coming soon or that they were in the last days so why work. It is not clear if the problem was one of an attitude of sell or give away all you have or why work if the end is soon.

Question: Why would Paul tell the members to stay away from those “living in idleness” instead of reasoning with them?

Challenge: What beliefs can cause someone to just live from day to day?

Scripture: I Thessalonians 1.1-2.16

Day 2: II Thessalonians 3.7-8⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. The phrase “to eat someone’s bread” was an idiom meaning “earn a living”. Paul uses the example of his own conduct among them as an example of a model for the church. In his other writings Paul tells the congregation that though he had the right to expect pay for his teaching, he did not do so. Paul wants to distance himself from other itinerate teachers of that time. He did not want anyone to say it was because of profit that he preached and taught.

Question: Do you think that Paul refused any sort of compensation?

Challenge: Why do you think we pay for pastor’s work today?

Scripture: I Thessalonians 2.17-3.13

Day 3: II Thessalonians 3.9

⁹This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. Paul did a lot of example setting especially in areas where there were mostly gentiles. As a result of his preaching about the Resurrection some folks believed that they had risen to some new spiritual plane that they did not need to work. Paul had to demonstrate, in a very practical way, how being in Christ both changed a person and kept them living in their community. Christians were not exempt from the community or from all the moral code of the day.

Question: Just what was Paul giving them that he wants them to give others?

Challenge: Look at your life and see if you learned best by hearing, seeing, doing or reading?

Scripture: I Thessalonians 4.1-5.28

Day 4: II Thessalonians 3.10¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

This phrase resonates with Genesis 3:19 (By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return).

There is a biblical & theological reason for working. The Genesis verse (written at a time when the readers were herders or farmers) is assuming that everybody needs to work at some sort of farming or herding. Because humans have disobeyed God they could no longer roam the garden and find food provided for them. Humans now had to live in a world where they must grow the food they need. Gods’ insistence that all should work and not be idle comes from the reality that outside of the Garden we must work or die. Paul’s words are not harsh but simply reflect reality. If however one is disabled or too infirm to work then it is the responsibility of the community to provide food and shelter for them (especially in cases where there is no family)

Question: How would you judge a person’s “willingness” to work?

Challenge: Can you think of other reasons for working that do not include being paid?

Scripture: II Thessalonians 1.1-12

Day 5: II Thessalonians 3.11-12¹¹ For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ¹²Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Paul restates the problem with not working; people become disorderly and cause trouble in the community by their example of not working. This end of the verse is hard for us to hear for it is asking us to work without a lot of noise about how hard we are working or how well we are working. In our culture today we seem to encourage folks to talk a lot about how hard they work and how little they are appreciated.

Question: What do you think the busybodies are doing?

Challenge: Can you find someone and encourage them to see that their work means more than getting paid.

Scripture: II Thessalonians 2.1--2.17

Day 6: II Thessalonians 3.13¹³ Brothers and sisters do not be weary in doing what is right.

Paul gives the church the obligation to stress good behavior and to confront those who are in idleness. However Paul tells the church that they are not to regard the erring ones as enemies. They are to warn and admonish them but not treat them as enemies. We are enjoined to not be weary in well doing, for if our actions will not bring the results we want we must be patient as God works through us. Anything done in Jesus’ name will bring fruit.

Question: How can you tell someone they are acting badly without treating them as enemies?

Challenge: Who do you know that you can encourage to keep doing what is right.

Scripture: II Thessalonians 3.1-18

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April 22, 2018

Day 1: Ecclesiastes 3:12

I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;

In our country we place a high value on personal freedom and the pursuit of happiness. There are a lot of opinions on just how we find happiness and just what personal freedom means. All of creation and our very existence as people is a gift from God. A gift is meant to be opened and used. The ability to be happy and to experience freedom come from our willingness to accept the responsibility to be producers. God told us in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply. Our consumption is experienced as happiness because we know that we produce. Our freedom is felt because we accept responsibility to act in a way that gives life.

Question: What is the difference between happiness and joy?

Challenge: Set a goal for yourself this week to produce more than you consume (food excepted unless you are a farmer)

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Day 2: Ecclesiastes 3:13

moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

Work is not a burden to bear but a thing to enjoy. When we work we build something - we produce. Taking pleasure in our toil means that we see the growth taking place and know that our work enabled that growth. Eating and drinking is done in community and is more than putting food in our bodies. It is taking the time to interact with others over a meal. Our current custom of pot-luck meals is an expression of the type of meal the writer encourages us to have.

Question: Do you enjoy your work? Why or why not?

Challenge: Think about your meals this week and see what your opinion of eating really is.

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:7-17

Day 3: Ecclesiastes 4:9

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

For parents, the phrase coming from a 2 or 3 year old, "I can do it myself" can cause concern. On the one hand we want the child to do things themselves but on the other hand some of the things they want to do they ought not to do. One of the challenges of raising children is to guide them to know the times they need help and the times they need to do it themselves. Too often we praise the *one* who does great feats (going around the world by themselves in a boat) when it is *partnerships* that bring about the most fruit and produces the best results.

Question: Do you agree with this verse?

Challenge: Give some examples of how this verse is correct and in what cases this verse might be wrong.

Scripture: Genesis 1:11-21

Day 4: Ecclesiastes 4:10

For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.

I think being alone is the worst feeling a person can have. The verse is practical in that if a person falls down and has a friend with them they can get help. I think there is a deeper meaning. In our journey through life our friends that journey with us (our good friends) can help us get up when life's issues knock us down. Friends provide the assurance that we are not alone.

Question: What would make a person a good friend?

Challenge: Have you ever fallen and were alone? What did you do and what did it feel like?

Scripture: Genesis 2:13-23

Day 5: Ecclesiastes 4:11

Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?

The writer is coming at partnership from a different angle. He does mean sharing body warmth in a cold place is better than relying on blankets but warmth comes from knowing that someone is sharing your hopes and dreams. In Monastic communities the monks (or nuns) do not share body warmth but they feel the warmth of their brothers and sisters around them. They might be in separate rooms but still feel the warmth of being together.

Question: Does knowing someone supports you keep you "warm?"

Challenge: When has God felt warm to you?

Scripture: Genesis 6:14-7:5

Day 6: Ecclesiastes 4:12

And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Jesus said (Matthew 18:20), "Where two or three are gathered together there am I in the midst of them." When two come together in Christ's name nothing will be able to prevail against them. As famous as Paul is for beginning new churches he was never alone in his work. We need to be together in Jesus' name, not our own. Even if it looks like the forces of evil have prevailed, still if two work in Christ's name they (we, the church) will prevail.

Question: How do you gather in Jesus' name? Is it a special prayer or attitude or a reading of scripture or what?

Challenge: Think of a modern example of where evil looked to be winning but in the long run lost.

Scripture: John 15:1-17

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April 29, 2018

Day 1: Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,

Whenever we gather for worship we gather with all those who have gone before. The Church is not just those here and now but it is all those who call Jesus Lord in every generation. The early Christians felt the support of all the saints who went before. They were bold in their witness and firm in their belief that Jesus is Lord and that this Jesus will bring us to the new kingdom. We have seen the hope of the world in Jesus Christ so then we can be bold, knowing God has come and is with us in the Holy Spirit.

Question: What do you think the writer means by “the race that is set before us”?

Challenge: Write down three names of those who have been spiritual mentors for you. Now write down three reasons why for each one.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:2-12

Day 2: Hebrews 12:2

looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus has been to the future and came to tell us that it is OK for us to go forward. Jesus' trip to the cross and his ascension gave proof to His claim of being the Son of the Father. His death was not the defeat of God's plan but the completion of that plan. The power of death was destroyed at the cross. Fear of the hereafter is gone because we know Jesus is ever before God's throne making intercession for us.

Question: What do you think “the joy that was set before Him” was?

Challenge: Do some research to see why the right hand is the place of honor and power.

Scripture: Hebrews 3:1-6, 5:1-8

Day 3: Hebrews 12:3-6

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children— ‘My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.’

The writer is not encouraging them to be martyrs but to endure the bad things that happen to them. Though Jesus is the example there is no thought that the people receiving this letter should suffer in the same way Jesus did. Most of the abuse that is coming their way is of a verbal form. Looking to Jesus encourages the readers not to become weary or faint.

Question: What does he mean “struggling against sin”? Is it their sin or the sin of others? Give some reasons for your answer.

Challenge: Think of a time when you have felt “instructed or disciplined” by the Lord.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:11, 5:23, 6:23, 12:1, 13:1, 19:18, 29:17

Day 4: Hebrews 12:7-8

Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children.

The sense of discipline is one of instruction. Instead of classroom instruction we need to think more of an athletic team. They practice and practice until they can perform well and win the contest. The training may be very hard but they are called upon to endure so that they will be in top form. An athlete puts up with the pain of the training so that they can learn their role on the team and perform well. A parent provides experiences for the child to help them grow up, become an adult, and do well in society. If we deny the child the hard experiences then we do not really care about them.

Question: The writer is stating that being disciplined is a way of knowing you are a child of God. Is there a better way of knowing you are a child of God?

Challenge: Think of a trial you have endured. How do you get through it?

Scripture: Ephesians 6:1-9, II Timothy 1:1-7

Day 5: Hebrews 12:9-10

Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness.

God will provide for us the experiences we need to grow and develop as a believer. Whatever instruction God is giving to us (through the hard events in life) is there for our good. Our parents may sometimes confuse what we want with what we need but God never does.

Question: What do you think it means to “share in his holiness”?

Challenge: What are (in your opinion) the 3-4 most important things a child should know? Did you teach them those?

Scripture: Revelation 3:19-22

Day 6: Hebrews 12:11-12

Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

When we have an injury to a knee and do not have it attended to it tends to throw off the hip or knee on the opposite side of our body. If we blame other people, society, the world in general or God for our troubles we will live our life as a victim. If we spend time in blaming then we do not spend the time needed in finding solutions. The writer in Hebrews offers us a way to see the problems in life not just as times of pain and suffering but also as opportunities to learn. Someone once said in a lecture - “fix the problem, not the blame.”

Question: Do we learn the most from our successes or our failures?

Challenge: Think of a time when discipline was painful but later on you were grateful for it.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 7:26-8:10