

Marks of Discipleship

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

May 6, 2018

Day 1: .Proverbs 15.13 A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.

This verse highlights the fact that our attitude has either a positive or negative effect on our healing. A glad heart refers to our whole being and is usually understood as sense of joy and gratitude with ones life. Our countenance is not just a smile but it is allowing the spirit of God to be seen in us whether we smile or cry.

Question: Do you think your attitude makes a big difference in how much you enjoy life?

Challenge: Pray each day this week for God to help you have a cheerful countenance

Scripture: Prov. 3.8,14.30,17.22

Day 2: Ecclesiastes 3:4 &12-13

4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; 13 moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

Because life experiences are both great and bad the way to find meaning and purpose in life is to spend time on those things that are important. We will find the most enjoyment with other people not things. We will find a sense of future if we invest in people not things, wealth or fame. Our purpose in life is to share the love of God and we derive meaning when we do that sharing.

Question: Why should we take pleasure in our work?

Challenge: See all of the work you are doing now (or have done in the past) and see when you felt the most satisfied with the job

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Day 3: Psalm 32:11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Being joyous does not mean happy all the time. The righteous are those who have been redeemed and need not worry about ever being separated from the love of God. Because we are secure in our place with God, because of Christ Jesus, we then ought to live a life of joy. In Paul's words "you really are a new person—so act like it".

Question: What do you think the difference is between joy and happy?

Challenge: Think about how you act— do you act as someone who has a secure place in eternity?

Day 4: Philippians 1:3&4

3 I thank my God every time I remember you, 4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,

People can multiply our joys and divide our sorrows. God does send people into our lives that we need to either multiply or divide. When recalling the times when individuals in the past have been with us, we give thanks in a brief but meaningful way. We recall how it felt to be cared for and we give thanks.

Question: Why are people helpful?

Challenge: Can you make a list of 5 people who have been with you during a trying time and a joyful time?

Scripture: Philippians 4

Day 5: Genesis 21.6-7

Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' 7 And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'

Isaac means —he who laughs—the Hebrew is a little vague for it could mean he who laughs at or with. Laughing "with" means that you join with the person in seeing the humor in some of the ways God works in someone's life. Laughing "at" means you are making fun of the person to embarrass or belittle them. All sorts of crazy things happen in life. To laugh "with" someone allows both to move closer as friends and loved ones and becomes a meaningful experience. To make fun of someone demonstrates one is an evil spirited individual.

Question: When has God brought laughter for you?

Challenge: Look at the news this week and notice how much of the criticism that is leveled at officials is really making fun of them.

Scripture: Genesis 21:1-7

Day 6: .2 Chronicles 30.10 So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them.

The context of this verse is that the King sent messengers to the whole land to all the people to come to the Passover feast in Jerusalem. Coming to Jerusalem and having the Passover was a way to call the people back to God's law—to remind them of who gave them the land and their life. Many it seems laughed at the call to return to God's law. The invitation goes out from God and perhaps of guilt many scorn the offer.

Question: Can you think of someone in the New Testament that was not just scorned but killed for offering the people Jesus? 2 chronicles 30

Challenge: This week as you travel about and see people, think of different ways you can offer them Christ.

Scripture: 2 chronicles 30

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May 13, 2018

Day 1: Romans 8:12

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh

Beginning with vs. 12 and continuing to vs. 17 Paul offers a description of the present Christian existence, rooted in God's past action in Jesus Christ and as an assurance of God's future action (being with God in eternity) for God's people. "We are debtors" because God has redeemed us from death. God made us both children and heirs.

Question: What would be some examples of living according to the flesh?

Challenge: Think of the term above, "debtors." It usually denotes something we do not want to be. What different word could you use?

Scripture: Romans 7:23-8:8

Day 2: Romans 8:13

for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

In fact Paul warns that going back to a former way of life is dangerous because our former way leads to death. The body is something that is passing (from dust you came and to dust you shall return). The spirit is life, not the body. Paul is not suggesting that we ignore our body but that we do not put our trust in it for eternity. When we plant a garden if we allow the weeds to overrun the garden then the flowers will be choked out. We must root out the weeds so that the flowers can grow. In the same way we need to watch to be sure the deeds of the body do not choke out the spirit.

Question: Do you think Paul is talking about having a longer life?

Challenge: How is your garden? Are there too many weeds? Do you need to plant some more good seed? How can you go about planting good seed?

Scripture: Philippians 3:16-4:5

Day 3: Romans 8:14

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

The way to root out the weeds is to overrun the garden with good fruit and flowers. We get rid of the weeds by enriching the soil, watering regularly and planting so much good grain that the weeds have no room to grow. The Spirit of God leads us just as the Spirit of God led the people of Israel in the time of the Exodus. As God's presence was seen and felt by those in the wilderness, so we today see and feel God's Spirit and that Spirit assures us that we are the children of God.

Question: Can we actually feel the Spirit of God in us or is it a matter of faith that the Spirit is with us?

Challenge: What do you recall was the greatest challenge to those in the wilderness?

Scripture: Romans 9:3-13

Day 4: Romans 8:15

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'

The God who sends the Son now sends the Spirit of the Son to assure those who are in Christ that they are adopted. Those who are in Christ are now sons and daughters in whom the Spirit dwells. Paul, thinking again of the Exodus, says we do not go back to Egypt - to slavery - but ahead to the Promised Land. A slave is fearful because they are not able to decide their future nor can they hope for a new land where they are free. Our debt to God is not a new form of slavery but it is the spirit of sonship.

Question: What does Abba mean?

Challenge: If we are the children of God through Christ – what is our main obligation as children?

Scripture: Galatians 3:15-29

Day 5: Romans 8:16

it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

The Holy Spirit itself comes along side of our human spirit to bear witness that we are God's children. We become children of God not through biology but through adoption. This allows the family of God to potentially include the whole world. Our God is Lord over all the earth. Though that day has not come, one day every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God.

Question: How do you think the Spirit bears witness with our spirit?

Challenge: Think of three ways you can witness to the love of God. Choose one to do this week.

Scripture: Romans 8:16-26

Day 6: Romans 8:17

and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

The conclusion of Paul's agreement comes in this verse. If we are in fact children of God then we will inherit just as Christ inherited; namely to be with God in eternity. The Holy Spirit bearing witness to our spirit assures us constantly that we are children and heirs of the promise. Paul closes with a word of caution that if Jesus suffered so might we. This caution is followed by the assurance that if we suffer with him it just shows we are in Him and this suffering becomes a sign that we are God's children/heirs of the promise of eternal life.

Question: Why is it a good thing to be joint heirs with Christ?

Challenge: Think about a time you "suffered" for your faith (even if it was just a small amount). What happened?

Scripture: Romans 9

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May 20, 2018

Day 1: II Corinthians 12:7

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.

In the previous verses Paul has spoken of his experience with someone who had a heavenly vision and was somehow transported to a heavenly realm. This person was not allowed to speak of what he saw. Paul then goes on to say he also has had heavenly visions. In their culture a heavenly vision was proof of divine approval. The exact nature of the “thorn” is not known. It was some kind of physical problem. The problem may have come from the forces of evil that were fighting against Paul. Paul turns around the affliction and makes it something positive. Paul puts the “thorn” in a different frame, one that allows him to see it as being helpful, not a deterrent to his ministry.

Question: What do you think the “thorn” might have been?

Challenge: Think about yourself. Is there something physically wrong with you that is at the same time helpful?

Scripture: II Corinthians 12:1-21, Acts 9:1-21

Day 2: II Corinthians 12:8

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,

The word “thorn” is a translation of a word that means pointed stick or a thorn. Paul does not believe that God is the cause of the problem so he is not asking for God to take the problem away but rather that it should leave him. Paul knows that anything “Satan” can bother him with can be turned into something that will be beneficial for Paul. It simply takes the correct attitude for Paul to use the “thorn” for some benefit.

Question: Why does Paul stop at three times?

Challenge: If the thorn is physical, what could it be? If the thorn is psychological what, could it be?

Scripture: Job 1 and 2

Day 3: II Corinthians 12:9a

but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’

God responds to Paul’s request (note that God always responds to our prayers and requests but the response is on God’s terms) with two answers. Paul’s appeal is answered by two assurances, not as one would expect by removing the thorn (God is the one who helped Paul see the problem in a different frame). The first assurance is that God’s grace is sufficient. The second is that God’s power will be seen through Paul’s weakness. God’s response let Paul know that he has not been forgotten and that God is still with him. What Paul wanted more than anything else is that Christ should be seen in his preaching and living. God is assuring him that even in weakness (Paul’s weakness) the strength of God will be seen.

Question: How is power made perfect in weakness?

Challenge: Think about God’s grace and see how it has been sufficient for you.

Scripture: Romans 8:21-31

Day 4: II Corinthians 12:9b

So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Boasting is a verbal expression that usually conveys an arrogant presumption about what will happen based on human effort. Paul turns its meaning around to confidently explain what will happen to those in Christ because of Christ’s self-giving on the cross. Paul “boasts” about the effects of his preaching on the people who received the message and proclaim Christ as Lord. Paul takes God’s response and expands from it to a way of living that is an example of God’s grace. The great signs and power that Paul has shown (the power that comes from Christ) is more evident for being a human vessel. Paul was not of a glib tongue nor an impressive figure never the less he had the power of Christ; and therefore was powerful.

Question: What is this “power of Christ”?

Challenge: How would you differentiate between bragging and Paul’s boasting?

Scripture: I Corinthians 1:20-30

Day 5: II Corinthians 12:10

Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, and then I am strong.

Paul’s example was the self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross. He always refers to that event when he needs to decide on a course of action. The Crucifixion looked to be a victory for the powers of evil but in fact it was the defeat of those powers. Paul’s words looked to be uncultured and weak but he had the power of God to perform great deeds. What looks to us like weakness is really the power of God. Love is stronger than hate because it can bring life into a dead situation.

Question: How do you understand the weakness Paul keeps referring to?

Challenge: Examine your life to see when you are strong in Christ.

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:38-48

Day 6: II Corinthians 12:12

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works.

This is a reminder that Paul did demonstrate (in a past visit) to the Corinthians that he was touched by God in Christ and sent with the power and authority to preach, teach and heal.

Question: Are the signs Paul used to describe a true apostle the signs we can look for in a Christian today?

Challenge: Think about mighty works; what would they be for you?

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:4-14

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May 27, 2018

Day 1: I Corinthians 13:1

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

We tend to associate the ability to speak persuasively and quick thinking with leadership ability. We also think that presenting an opinion with great passion means that opinion is correct. In Paul's view the person's ability to be a leader is related to their ability to love. Love (God's love) has the power to give life. It is what created the world and all that is in it. We can also give life as we become a means through which God can love the world. In the Christian church leadership is in our ability to love.

Question: What do you think the phrase "tongues of angels" means?

Challenge: Look at the gifts of the Spirit in the scripture below and see which ones are the most critical for our world today.

Scripture: I Corinthians 12:27-31

Day 2: I Corinthians 13:2-3

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

When Steve Jobs left as CEO of Apple many wondered who would come up with the new ideas for technology. We are in a very fast paced world where individuals are hoping to find the next big thing and get in on it early enough to make a lot of money. If someone could really tell the future they would be worth billions. If Bill Gates gave away all his wealth in hopes it would secure him a place in history for all time he would be disappointed. The only investment we can make that will stand till the end of time is by sharing love with someone in the next generation. Christians invest in people.

Question: Can you imagine what the prophetic powers were?

Challenge: Thinking of the verse above, how do you go about judging who is a leader in the church?

Scripture: I John 1

Day 3: I Corinthians 13:4-6

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Love is more than a feeling; it does feel good but not always. Love is a force of energy that can bring forth life. As was said above, out of love God created the world and out of love God sent his Son to give His life for the world. The love of God transforms us. The list of things that describe and exemplify love that Paul mentions here are the things that too many in the Corinthian congregation were lacking. Love does not insult or make fun of others. It listens and celebrates the successes others have.

Question: What would be a good working definition of "rude"?

Challenge: Can you think of a time when you rejoiced in something going wrong in someone else's life? Or a decision they made that went bad and you thought "I told you so"?

Scripture: I John 2

Day 4: I Corinthians 13:7-8

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

God's love is for the long haul. Love has a tenacity in the present because of its absolute confidence in the future. Love never fails nor does it ever run out. When we compare the ability to read the future in the present, to speak with great eloquence and know the great secrets of life to the love Christ demonstrated on the cross, they are nothing. All of the world may come to an end but love will not.

Question: Do we run out of love?

Challenge: Can you think of something else that endures as long as or longer than love?

Scripture: I John 3

Day 5: I Corinthians 13:9-10

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

The final end of this age has not yet come but the new age has begun. All the spiritual gifts that God gives to the church are necessary for now. These spiritual gifts enable the Church to manifest (make known) the Gospel - the good news that God is redeeming the creation in Christ Jesus. When God's final work of redemption, in Christ, is reached then there will be no need for spiritual gifts. When the sun rises we have no need of lesser lights (Karl Barth).

Question: Why is knowledge power? Is there a time when not knowing is better than knowing?

Challenge: Think of the spiritual gifts. Come up with a list that fits today using 'life giving' as a definition of spiritual.

Scripture: I John 4

Day 6: I Corinthians 13:11-13

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

The closing verse does not have to do with childishness or growing up. It has to do with present and future. Paul is saying that the behavior for one part of life is correct for that time. When the new age comes then those gifts will not be needed. Love is forever but the gifts are temporary and correct for the time of the church. When the Kingdom comes in fullness there will be no need for faith or hope. Love on the other hand is eternal and will be at the center of the Kingdom. If love will last then we ought to pursue it with vigor, instead of the other gifts.

Question: In the Kingdom of God why do we not need hope or faith?

Challenge: Can you look at your life and design a plan to improve your ability to love?

Scripture: I Corinthians 13