

Marks of Discipleship

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

August 5, 2018

Day 1: Isaiah 60:1

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

The light recalls God's early act in creation. God said, "Let there be light" and the darkness was cast away. *Arise* means to get up from your present state and stand. The light of God is here and we can reflect that light to the nations. The nations shall see a bright light in the distance and be drawn to it. The glory of the Lord is the salvation of the people and their vindication. Isaiah has said earlier that the people have paid double for all their sins (Isaiah 40:1-3). This verse gives us direction as to how we should respond to God's love. We are to reflect God's love to the whole world so that they might see and be drawn to the light. The assumption is that the people will choose light.

Question: Do you hear this verse as the dawn? Or light breaking through the clouds? Or something like an eclipse?

Challenge: The assumption in this verse is that people will choose the light. How come so many choose darkness?

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-20

Day 2: Isaiah 60:2

For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.

The darkness is the attitude that power comes through force of arms. When Isaiah was writing, a nation or a person was admired by how well they could force their will on others. The ability to force your will on another nation or person was done by the force of arms. It was done by individuals by accumulating wealth and enslaving others. The Lord is not seen in such an environment. The glory of the Lord is seen where life grows, not where fear thrives.

Question: How can we push back the darkness?

Challenge: How does the glory of the Lord appear to you?

Scripture: Isaiah 40:21-31

Day 3: Isaiah 60:3

Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

The Persian empire was gaining new territory at a great rate when this was written. The world's eyes were turned their direction because they were the mightiest force in that region. Isaiah is saying that even in the midst of the current reality that in fact, the light of God and God's people will draw nations to it, not the power of Persia. This is the same message in Revelation in regards to the Roman Empire and the Church. Even though the Romans at the moment were all powerful, still the Church would one day draw more people to its light than the city of Rome.

Question: What is the difference between being a good example and a light?

Challenge: At times in our nation's history we have been held up as a light to the world. Is it possible for us to be light to the nations?

Scripture: Isaiah 41:1-20

Day 4: Isaiah 60:4

Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

Isaiah tells us to look and see the people who are coming to God. In the midst of a world where evil seems to be everywhere we need to see that not everybody has given themselves up to evil. Isaiah is asking us (as Jesus did) to look about us and recognize the footprints of God. We do not see God because we have expectations of how God should appear and what is godly. One of the big challenges we have in our modern world is to recognize where and how God is being revealed.

Question: Does God work the same way in the first century as today?

Challenge: How do you see God being revealed in your daily life?

Scripture: Isaiah 66:6-24

Day 5: Isaiah 60:5

Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

When one nation conquered another the loser had to pay tribute to the winner. This tribute or tax was collected each year and was used to keep the victor's pockets full. The notion of the weaker having gifts brought to them was nonsense to the culture in the ancient world. The victor got the prize, not the second place person. The wealth of nations comes to Zion because of the willingness of those giving. Gifts are given to God out of love and gratitude not because we feel guilty or are trying to pay God back.

Question: Are taxes fair? What are you willing to pay taxes for?

Challenge: How do you feel about second or third place?

Scripture: Isaiah 60:11-22

Day 6: Isaiah 60:6

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Gold and Frankincense are royal gifts. Not only gifts of a practical nature will come to Zion but gifts that acknowledge God as King. When we give a gift to God we acknowledge that God is King. We give not only out of gratitude but out of a sense that the one who rules can use our money well. It is more difficult to acknowledge God as ruler over our finances than any other aspect of our life.

Question: Why did our writer pick camels as an example of wealth?

Challenge: How did you divide up your gift giving this year? Did God get much of a Christmas?

Scripture: Matthew 2:2-16

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August 12, 2018

Day 1: I Timothy 6:3

Teach and urge these duties. Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness,

In the first century a teacher was one who could take complex ideas and make them understandable to other people. A teacher knew not only factual data but was a wise person. They were relying on a body of knowledge that described how the world worked and why it worked the way it did. Timothy is being encouraged (not just Timothy, but the whole church) to pass on to the next generation the teaching of Jesus. At this time there was very little actually written down about what Jesus said, so His teaching was conveyed by word of mouth.

Question: What five words come to mind when you think of a teacher?

Challenge: Take the birth account of Jesus and work up a plan to teach it to an adult who has never heard it before.

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-2:12

Day 2: I Timothy 6:4-5

is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

A teacher's goal was to communicate the "teaching" in humility and accuracy. The teacher is supposed to recede into the background and the teaching comes to the foreground. Jesus is the one lifted up, not the teacher. A teacher was held in high esteem but the teacher should not try to impress, nor should they crave approval. The teacher is told to stick to the text and not to encourage speculation over matters that will divert attention from the teaching. A person with the gift of teaching is not supposed to use their skills for personal gain.

Question: If you were to become a teacher, what would you teach and who would you teach?

Challenge: Write a working definition of humility and compare it with the scripture below.

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Day 3: I Timothy 6:6-8

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

The "gain" we receive from our teaching is the knowledge that we are a part of God's plan of redemption for the world. This knowledge, that we are a vital part of God's plan, but the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and as such we are carrying out God's plan of redemption.

Question: How would you calculate a fair price for teaching children?

Challenge: How would it be possible to be content with just food and clothing?

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-34

Day 4: I Timothy 6:9

But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

Let's assume a person received, from God, an insight that is guaranteed to help people deal with any personal problem, no matter what it is. After telling their story to a publisher they are promised an obscene amount of money to publish a book. It would be very tempting to believe that with all that money you would really help people and not keep the money.

Question: How hard would it be to turn down that book offer?

Challenge: Take a look at your life and see where you have had senseless and harmful desires.

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Day 5: I Timothy 6:10

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

A teacher or preacher or administrator or any other role in the Church will come to ruin if the person allows pay to be the basis for doing their work. All these people should be paid but if pay is the goal then they will wander from the faith. In our lives, if money is the reason for our actions then our actions will come to ruin.

Question: In your opinion, what roles in the Church should be paid and which should be non-paid?

Challenge: How much do you love money?

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:10-17

Day 6: I Timothy 6:11-12

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

We will find enough as we become part of God's plan for the redemption of the world. We have made a faith commitment to God and accepted Christ as Lord. But we need to each day remind ourselves that we need to live as a follower. Pray this prayer each morning as a way to center yourself: *Change my heart, oh God. Clean me out inside. Make me new. Heal my desires. Help me to hold my possessions loosely. Help me to love you. Teach me simplicity. Teach me generosity and help me have joy. I offer you my life. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Question: Do you see your work in life (that which you get paid for) as being part of God's plan of redemption?

Challenge: Take 5 or 6 minutes to pray the prayer above and to reflect upon it; then pray it each day for the next month.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:32-12:4

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August 19, 2018

Day 1: Proverbs 13:4

The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing, while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied.

Diligence is a quality of being wise. A wise person is one who combines knowledge with morals and experience with patience. A wise person is humble when expressing their opinions. The wise person has a commitment to the truth and is always ready to change their mind if new information comes along. The lazy person does not see the value in work so they do not value what they have. The wise person, because they appreciate what they have, always has enough.

Question: Do you find yourself in the position of the lazy one?

Challenge: Write your own definition of wisdom.

Scripture: Proverbs 13:12-25

Day 2: Proverbs 10:4

A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

A diligent person thinks of the future. They make goals for the very near future, the mid future, and the long term future. In addition to goals, they apply values to their goals to make sure their goals honor God. The slack hand is simply one who thinks in just present terms. They think about doing what is easiest for them personally. They will not only not become rich, but always be in want. The slack hand is one that uses their credit card too much.

Question: Why is goal setting important or why is it not important?

Challenge: Write down for yourself two short, mid, and long term goals. Make sure one in each category relates to your faith.

Scripture: Proverbs 10:1-14

Day 3: Proverbs 21:5

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.

The diligent person knows when it is time to think something through before making a decision. This is especially true in a community that has a number of interconnected relationships. The implication here is that plans made in haste are ones that will benefit just the person and may harm others. For example in building a house; if proper attention is not given to the foundation then the house will not stand long and might come down when it is full of people you care about, like your family. Even a diligent person cannot foresee the future but patience in decision making can help us avoid most of the problems we cannot see now.

Question: Which decisions do you find are the hardest for you to make? Are they decisions about buying, decisions about relationships or some other category of decisions?

Challenge: Give an example of a hasty decision you made and one that was planned out.

Scripture: Proverbs 1:1-19

Day 4: Proverbs 21:17

Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want; whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich.

To love something means that you are willing to give up some of yourself so that the object of your love might grow and prosper. If pleasure is what we love it will grow and with each growth it demands more of our love so that we will be consumed by pleasure and never be satisfied.

Question: Why isn't pleasure satisfying?

Challenge: Who or what have you loved that you have given up some of yourself for it?

Scripture: Proverbs 21:1-17

Day 5: Proverbs 21:20

Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise, but the fool devours it.

The wise person does not spend just to spend. The wise person is not afraid to spend but does so when needed. One of the main reasons people will spend when they do not need to is because they enjoy the feeling of power it gives them. Too often we feel powerless to do something we want to do and spending gives us that feeling of power. With credit we can devour our income on a foolish thing--- interest. To pay someone to use their money so we can feel powerful is foolish.

Question: What percent of one's income should one save?

Challenge: Draw up a budget for yourself that includes your charity giving first.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:1-16

Day 6: Proverbs 21:21

Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor.

Righteousness here would be following the intent of the moral code as well as its law. We have laws against stealing. If someone takes something that is not theirs and excuses that action by saying no one is hurt and no one misses it, they are not following the intent of the law. The law is not there to punish but to tell me what is wrong. If I do something that is legal like damming a river on my property but I am "stealing" food from those downstream, I may be legal but still stealing. The intent of that law is to help us feel safe and to provide a safe community. An honorable person lives by a set of values that acknowledges God as Creator and humans as ones for whom Christ died. By following the intent of how God wants us to live, and practicing kindness, we will find life. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and your neighbor as yourself."

Question: How does God want us to love him?

Challenge: Put these words in the order they are important to you now: honor, safety, money, family, happiness, food and shelter, vacation, country, church, truth, peace, love.

Scripture: Proverbs 28:1-20

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August 26, 2018

Day 1: Hebrews 13:1-2

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

The church is reminded that the love they have for each other is to be extended to “strangers.” The strangers are believed to be itinerant Christians who depended upon the various Christian communities for hospitality. Even though these strangers might be Christians, there was some hesitation about welcoming them as the community did not know them. The allusion to entertaining angels reminds us of the time Abraham welcomed angels. Hospitality was more than giving food and shelter, it was giving of your time to the stranger. The host did not leave the guest alone.

Question: Why do you think hospitality was held as a high value among Jews? (Leviticus 19:31)

Challenge: Define hospitality for our time.

Scripture: Genesis 18:1-21

Day 2: Hebrews 13:3

Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

One can tell by the verse that “remember” means more than an intellectual activity. We are not asked to recall those in prison or ones tortured but to be with them. In today’s terms we would say to empathize with them at the same time try to do something to relieve their suffering. A person may not have the power to release someone from prison or stop the torture, but we can do what is possible. Our author is telling us that in Christian community we do not stand by and watch and shake our heads. We are not asked to do violence -- but to treat those in pain as if it was you.

Question: Why would a Christian be put in jail? Is this still happening today?

Challenge: Find out about the UMC’s prison ministry.

Scripture: Acts 5:16-42

Day 3: Hebrews 13:4

Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.

This verse focuses on sexual relations in marriage. The same respect that is shown publicly is to be shown in private and in the most intimate moments. It is in the intimate moments that one is vulnerable to the other. One must never take advantage of another person. Fornication is sexual relations outside of marriage. It has the sense of casual sex, though any sex outside of the marriage covenant is warned against. Of course sex with someone who is not your wife or husband is forbidden.

Question: What do you think is not allowed in marriage?

Challenge: How would you discourage a young person from being sexually active?

Scripture: Ecclesiastics 2:13-23

Day 4: Hebrews 13:5-6

Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’ So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?’

This is another bit of advice that helps us with the business of living an abundant life. Money is a tool to help us achieve our purpose in life. If we worry too much about what money can give us then we will begin to believe that it is money that will help us in life. We put our trust in God for only God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8).

Question: How much money is enough?

Challenge: When you have loved money (or have been close to loving money), what was happening in your life and how did you overcome it?

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:5-15

Day 5: Hebrews 13:7

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Those who are leaders are the ones who have demonstrated the gifts of the Spirit. They have a profound sense of humility and gratitude to God. Those we are to follow are people who have faith and show it. These leaders are not perfect but they strive for perfection in love and relationships. They especially act in a Christ-like way to those of the household of faith.

Question: What is the one trait a good leader must have?

Challenge: How can you be a leader in your church?

Scripture: Number 7:10-11

Day 6: Hebrews 13:8-9

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them.

We have a God who is not moved but is always changing. What does not move is God’s love for us and God’s promise of redemption. What is changing is how God is experienced in each generation. God does not change but how we are to apply God’s plan to our time changes and how we are to communicate God’s love changes. Strange teaching is anything that says our way to God is not through Jesus Christ.

Question: What do you think some of the strange teachings were?

Challenge: What part of Jesus is the same forever?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 26:12-27.3