

# Marks of Discipleship

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

September 2, 2018

## Day 1: Matthew 6:19

***'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal;***

The term we translate as *treasure* could mean "what we treasure" or ones' total self - all that makes us real. The term *rust* means to "eat away." It would be like a worm that would eat away at an object. Most of us believe (because of the various experiences that remind us) that life does not consist in what we have. What we have to guard against is the fear of not having enough. This fear is what causes us to believe that we must gather all we can, even if it is at the expense of our family and friends.

**Question:** What is the safest place to keep what you own?

**Challenge:** Make a list of the things you have that you treasure.

**Scripture:** Luke 11:34-36, 12:21-34, 16:13

## Day 2: Matthew 6:20

***but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.***

The phrase "treasure in heaven" was a common Jewish image for the future reward. Matthew however does not spell out how the disciples are to understand the phrase. From other things that Jesus talked about we can gather that they were to store up heavenly treasure by serving as Christ's ambassadors in the world. We need to proclaim the reason for our hope. We need to shine the light of God into the dark places in people's lives.

**Question:** Where do you think heaven is located?

**Challenge:** From your Day 1 list, what items will not be consumed by moth or rust?

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:24-12:4

## Day 3: Matthew 6:21

***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

The "heart" in Jesus' time is not the seat of feeling or emotion but was where the mind and being were located. Too many people are orienting their life to secure a treasure that is in a monetary form. Jesus is saying that our way of living with the rest of creation (people and nature) shows what we believe is important and where we will spend our time and money.

**Question:** Does money determine how we spend our time?

**Challenge:** Of your time, talent and money, how much do you give (in percentage) to God's work?

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastics 2:13-23

## Day 4: I Timothy 6:17

***As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.***

The problem with wealth is not the money but the attitudes that often come from having so much. Folks with a lot of money can become "haughty"- believing they are better than others. They can put their hopes in their wealth instead of God. A person will not automatically have these attitudes because they are wealthy, but the temptation is very great. Paul is telling Timothy and the church not to spend their valuable time on gaining wealth, nor should they assume that if someone is wealthy they are better or know more. It is a bold statement that God will provide all we need. It is bold because our life experiences will try to tell us otherwise.

**Question:** Would you elect a poor person for President?

**Challenge:** Without Social Security or retirement funds, how did people live if they were too old to work?

**Scripture:** Psalm 101

## Day 5: I Timothy 6:18

***They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,***

Say I found myself walking across a desert with a gallon of water and knew I needed only a pint to have enough for me to cross that desert. If there were others on the trip with me I am more likely to give them water because I am free from the fear of having enough for the journey. Having enough money gives us a sense of security so that we have the energy to do good deeds. The fear of not having enough is what keeps us from helping others. Citizens of a country are usually afraid of too many new immigrants because they fear they might lose some of what they have worked for all their life. It is that fear of not having enough that keeps us from sharing.

**Question:** How would you understand "doing good" in this passage?

**Challenge:** How much is enough for you to be unafraid of the future?

**Scripture:** Exodus 34:35-35:10

## Day 6: I Timothy 6:19

***thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.***

I cannot say for sure but I wonder if the future spoken of is that time when we know our life on earth will come to a conclusion. At that point we want to say to ourselves "well done thou good and faithful servant enter into my joy." We want to know we have lived our life so that God is pleased with us, because we did not waste what God gave to us in the days we were on earth. When I have talked to folks whose life is coming to a close they do not say they will miss their "stuff" but the people they loved. In order to come to the point in our life to know we have done well and been a faithful disciple, we have to begin now to commit ourselves to be generous with our time, talent and money. We owe everything to God. We need to acknowledge that reality in our actions.

**Question:** What does it mean "life that is really life"?

**Challenge:** What will you commit to God's work? Will you give 10% of your time, talent and money to God?

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:19-21, I Timothy 6:17-19

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September 9, 2018

## Day 1: II Corinthians 9:1-2

***Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them***

Corinth is a city in the middle of Greece. Macedonia is a region in the far north of Greece. Paul has been telling everybody in Greece how generous the Corinthians are with their money. Paul has used them as a way to encourage others to give generously. Paul is fulfilling his promise to bring relief to the church in Jerusalem by asking the other congregations to help the Jerusalem church in a financial way. It seems that the church in Corinth pledged to give generously to the saints in Jerusalem.

**Question:** Paul said it was not necessary to explain why the money was needed. Why is that true?

**Challenge:** Who (a person or organization) do you think of when you think of an example of a generous giver?

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-18

## Day 2: II Corinthians 9:3

***But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be;***

The “brothers” are Titus and two unnamed men (II Corinthians 8:16-24). Paul is making sure that the Corinthians’ first response has not changed, nor has the fact that Paul has rebuked them for some of their practices (I Corinthians 11:17-34) reduced the amount of the gift. The collection will not take place until Paul arrives. It may be that the money is already put aside and Paul just has to pick it up. With the coming of the advance guard there will hopefully be no embarrassing moments when Paul arrives.

**Question:** How would you like to be reminded that you made a pledge?

**Challenge:** What is the best way to ask people to contribute to a cause?

**Scripture:** I Corinthians 15:26-36

## Day 3: II Corinthians 9:4

***otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking.***

For Greeks and Romans shame and honor were major themes in their culture. Paul is appealing to their sense of honor as he reminds them that he has already been telling others in Macedonia about their generosity. Notice that Paul does not say that they will be humiliated, but that both they and Paul will be humiliated. Paul is not “covering his backside” but he is saying “I am part of you and what you do does affect me.” Paul believes all Christians are part of the body of Christ.

**Question:** Do you think Paul is being a bit manipulative?

**Challenge:** Think of a promise that you have made. Would you be humiliated if you did not fulfill it?

**Scripture:** James 4:8-5:1

## Day 4: II Corinthians 9:5

***So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as extortion.***

Paul feels that if he goes and asks for the gift then it will feel like he is demanding. A gift is not a gift unless it is given freely. There are many things we give but if it is not given freely, it is not a gift. Our attitude when we give something does make a difference on the giver and the receiver.

**Question:** Why do you think Paul believed that if he asked for the gift it would seem like extortion?

**Challenge:** How did you feel about that last gift you gave and why?

**Scripture:** Matthew 19:16-26

## Day 5: II Corinthians 9:6

***The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.***

Planting in Paul’s time was done by throwing the seed onto the ground. Maybe a little furrow would be made but nothing like our planting methods today. If one did not plentifully throw seed out then not much would come back. With that method of planting one needed to throw a generous amount of seed.

**Question:** Think over the past few years; have you been “sowing bountifully” or “sparingly”?

**Challenge:** Can you restate this verse in non-farming terms?

**Scripture:** Galatians 6:1-10

## Day 6: II Corinthians 9:7-8

***Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.***

Paul’s attitude about giving comes from his experience of seeing Jesus and knowing that Jesus forgave him for his past and trusted Paul with the message of hope. God loved Paul not because God had to, but because God wanted to. We give not because we have to, but out of gratitude for what God has given us. Paul experienced (on the Damascus Road and many other times) God’s grace and God’s gifts. Paul is telling us that God has given to him in abundance, and in an abundance that was unexpected. The only response that is in keeping with the gift is to share. When Peter asked Jesus how he could show his love Jesus said, “feed my sheep.”

**Question:** What did Paul do when he was Saul? See Acts 7:60-8:1, 9:1-2

**Challenge:** What would it take for you to give more? Think of something besides “more income.”

**Scripture:** Acts 4:32-5:5

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September 16, 2018

## Day 1: Acts 2:42

***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***

In Acts 2 we have a picture of the very early church in Jerusalem. This is the only place we know of that practiced the communal living described in these verses. The teaching was the recollections of Jesus' life and teachings. The fellowship was the sharing of their hopes and dreams with each other. The breaking of the bread was the sharing of a meal that recalled Jesus' life and declared to the world that He was present through the church. Jesus was the manifestation of God while he was present and the sacraments are the manifestation of Christ in the Church. The prayers were their worship together.

**Question:** How much time do you think they devoted to all the activities above? Do you think it was daily or weekly or what?

**Challenge:** If you had to design a worship service on the pattern above, what would it look like?

**Scripture:** John 15:1-17

## Day 2: Acts 2:43

***Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.***

Signs and wonders are manifestations of God and proof that the power of God is to give life. The signs that we think about most often are the dramatic ones (healings, tongues or casting out demons) but God is manifested any time life is given. God created life, not death, and God is still creating life. Awe or amazement came upon witness of these signs because they were done, not in the sacred Temple Mount, but in the midst of the people. God came not in the midst of the sacred but in the midst of the profane and ordinary. Jesus did not hang out in the Temple but with the people who needed to see and hear God through Him.

**Question:** Can you name all the apostles? Hint: there were 12. Another hint: Acts 1:12-26

**Challenge:** Can you see in your life signs of God's presence? Are you helping to create them?

**Scripture:** Acts 3

## Day 3: Acts 2:44

***All who believed were together and had all things in common;***

Having all things in common was not the usual way to live, even in the first century. Families may pool their resources to take care of the family but the Jerusalem Church did so for people from different families. These early Christians were mostly Jews but they were not all Jews of Jerusalem. Some of them came from other lands and were Greek speaking. These early followers of Jesus in Jerusalem also came from different regions in Palestine. In our church we exhibit a small portion of this sharing by holding meals where we share our food.

**Question:** What do you see as a problem with pooling our resources?

**Challenge:** Think of our church and see where we share some things in common.

**Scripture:** Acts 4:23-37

## Day 4: Acts 2:45

***they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.***

In a smaller way a Lutheran church in Bethlehem operates their finances this way. The pastor takes the collection and deposits it and writes checks for what the congregation needs. The larger church (the Lutheran church in Jordan and the Holy Land) pays many of the bills but the congregation allows the pastor to take care of the rest. The Jerusalem church, at this time, was willing to live day to day. They lived the Lord's Prayer. The Apostles did not have mortgages or utility bills to worry about nor did they have investments to be concerned about. They all shared food and other living expense just like everybody else. They also did not have health insurance or pensions to concern themselves with.

**Question:** Do you think this is a good way to organize a community financially? Why or why not?

**Challenge:** How do we do this in a small way today in our country?

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:5-14

## Day 5: Acts 2:46

***Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,***

Each person was willing to turn over not only their lives but their money to God in Christ. The outcome of their style of living was that they did live abundant lives. The spirit and body were fed and relationships were the source of meaning. They were related to God in Christ. They were related to each other in Christ and to the rest of the world in Christ. We do not organize our congregations the way the Jerusalem church, did but we can learn from them about what is important in the church.

**Question:** How would you define generous?

**Challenge:** Do you find yourself eating with a glad and generous heart? When you do, who is present with you?

**Scripture:** James 4

## Day 6: Acts 2:47

***praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.***

This early community lived in peace with those around them. At the same time the reason for their life style caused concern among the leaders of the Temple. The Church has and will stand in opposition to any institution that limits people from practicing hospitality, fairness, love, or restricting the Gospel of Christ. The Jerusalem church believed the best way for them to express their relationship with God was to organize themselves the way they did. Each Christian needs to respond to God's grace in a similar manner. We must express our relationship to God in a tangible way to the world. This can be in our profession, our volunteering or our public service. We are ambassadors of Christ and being such we ought to represent Christ. We need to let the world know we serve a living Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Question:** Why do you think many came to this early church?

**Challenge:** How can you in your family or job praise God and have the good will of those around you?

**Scripture:** Galatians 2:14-3.3

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September 23, 2018

## Day 1: Genesis 1:1

***In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,***

God existed before the heavens and earth were created. Eternity is a term used to describe a state of timelessness. Eternity is a condition where there is no beginning or end. Eternity can be thought of as outside of time. God existing outside of time helps us to understand why it is difficult to talk about God communicating with people. We exist in time and God exists outside of time.

**Question:** One of the questions not often asked about creation is: why would God do such a thing?

**Challenge:** Try to describe what was before the "beginning."

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 4:27-37

## Day 2: Genesis 1:2

***the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.***

The first chapter in Genesis describes how God brings order out of chaos. Our God does not want chaos to be the environment His creation lives in. When there is chaos people do not thrive. We can exist but to thrive we need order. Both humans and the rest of creation are very adaptable but we cannot live in a world constantly physically changing. Do you recall when Lava lamps were popular? Can you imagine living in a world where the land was constantly changing like a Lava lamp? When things change to establish and encourage chaos it is not God at work. When change brings more order and thereby helps us thrive, then it is God at work.

**Question:** What do you think it means that the earth was formless?

**Challenge:** Think of a time in your life when chaos was in control. How did you bring order out of that chaos?

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:21-31

## Day 3: Genesis 1:3-5

***Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.***

Too many people find fault with the Genesis account of creation because they take the word day as a 24 hour day. Before God creates time, God calls into being hope and salvation. Light is a symbol of hope and salvation and God creates light and calls it good because with each dayspring (dawn), humanity can be reminded that the Son has risen to give us hope and salvation.

**Question:** Jewish people have Sabbath beginning at sundown on Friday and ending at sundown on Saturday - why?

**Challenge:** See if it is possible to find a totally dark place and see how long you can stand being there.

**Scripture:** Isaiah 45:5-12

## Day 4: Genesis 1:6

***And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.***

Created order continues with the separation of the earth and heavens. The writer, not knowing that space is as large as it is, uses the word dome to describe the separation. Water adds to the images of hope and salvation by adding forgiveness. Water is used to cleanse our bodies and symbolically cleanse our spirits. All the water that God created is still here. Just as the dawn with its light reminds us of hope, flowing water reminds us that God will refresh us and give us our physical needs.

**Question:** Does this imply that at one time everything was water?

**Challenge:** If there is no real "dome" separating earth and heaven and heaven is where God dwells - how would you describe how they are separated?

**Scripture:** Isaiah 42:1-10

## Day 5: Genesis 1:7-8

***So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.***

God names the elements of creation *after* they come into being. It is almost as if God wanted to see what the thing looked like before giving it a name. Naming something entails knowledge and a relationship with the item named. God, by naming, declares control of and responsibility for the earth and heavens. The theme of controlling the earth and heavens is repeated countless times in the Old Testament. At the end of the creation account (Genesis 2:20) God gave to Adam the privilege of naming the birds and animals. By bestowing this privilege and power humanity has, with God, the responsibility for the care of creation. Our current concern for the earth is not grounded in "it's the right thing to do" but in creation itself and God's commands regarding our responsibility for creation.

**Question:** Does naming something give you control over it? If not, why do people want something named after them?

**Challenge:** How can we use the creation story to take care of the pollution problem?

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:4-20

## Day 6: Genesis 1:9-10

***And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.***

God, by calling it good says that the created world will sustain life and also allow life to thrive on this earth. Even though humanity's disobedience caused creation to move toward chaos, God still maintains that creation is good. We today find both great happiness and sadness in this world. What God gives us each day is possibilities, not guarantees.

**Question:** Do we have enough land to feed ourselves? Why do you think so and how many do you think we can feed?

**Challenge:** Begin each day with a simple prayer - God thank you for the new day with its possibilities. Help me to see what is possible and act on that possibility.

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:11-20, John 1:1-18

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September 30, 2018

## Day 1: Exodus 14:5-6

**5** When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed towards the people, and they said, 'What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?' **6** So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; **7** he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.

Pharaoh, still not sure of his decision to let his workforce escape, he decides to compound all his bad decisions by going after the Hebrews with an army. How soon people forget and go chasing after what they ought not to have.

**Question:** How much time do you think went by before the king decided to go after the Hebrews?

**Challenge:** Think of a time in your life when one bad decision led to another.

**Scripture:** James 4:1-11, Proverbs 3:34

## Day 2: Exodus 14:9-11

**9** The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. **10** As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. **11** They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?'

This is the first of a series of complaints made by the freed slaves about the risks of freedom. They are convinced that the Egyptian army will kill them because there is no place to run. Their backs are against the sea and they have no boats. The Israelites complaining are saying that given a choice they would prefer to die in Egypt of old age and as slaves, rather than as a free people. How quickly they have forgotten the cost of freeing them and how God bent the powerful Pharaoh to his will. How soon we forget what God has done for us when we face new and difficult problems.

**Question:** If the Hebrews were so numerous, why were they afraid of the advancing army?

**Challenge:** See if you can find the areas spoken of in verse 9.

**Scripture:** Numbers 21:4-9

## Day 3: Exodus 14:12-14

**12** Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' **13** But Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. **14** The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.'

The act that God is about to do will show to all the real power and glory of God. It seems that Pharaoh will use Egyptian power to destroy the Hebrews but everything is as God has planned. Pharaoh sees the slaves and he resolves to destroy them. It seems that it was his intention all along to get revenge on Moses and the slaves for the many losses he suffered. Moses does not answer the protesters but rather he uses the trust he has developed for God's providence to state that (he did not know exactly how) God would indeed fight for the people, they just had to watch.

**Question:** What did some of the Hebrews want to do?

**Challenge:** Between verses 13 and 14 there are at least 3 suggestions for dealing with your anxiety (don't be afraid - stand firm - keep still). Which one could you do and which one would you have the hardest time doing?

**Scripture:** Luke 1:30-33, Psalm 23, Matthew 14:23-33, Psalm 37:10-11

## Day 4: Exodus 14:15-16

**15** Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. **16** But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.'

Poor Moses. God keeps giving him orders to do something that seems impossible .. Moses is supposed to tell the people to start walking into the sea before dry land has appeared. I often wonder who was first because I believe that the waters did not part until someone first put their foot into the sea.

**Question:** What two things did the people and Moses have to do before they crossed the sea?

**Challenge:** How would you feel if you were one of the Hebrews and your leader said to walk into the sea?

**Scripture:** Joshua 3

## Day 5: Exodus 14:21-22

**21** Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. **22** The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

As the people walked, the waters parted and formed a wall on either side of them. As long as they kept their eyes on the road ahead of them they would not fear the wall of water falling on them. Just like Peter walking on the water, as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus he would not sink, but as soon as he thought about the turbulent water he began to sink.

**Question:** What time of day does the sea recede and is it important?

**Challenge:** When was the last time you had to go forward without seeing a good ending?

**Scripture:** Matthew 14:23-33, John 3:1-10

## Day 6: Exodus 14:23-28

**23** The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. **24** At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. **27** So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. **28** The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

The sad part of this encounter is what happened to the army. They followed orders and were drowned. I wonder if Pharaoh had led the way would the disaster have actually happened. Anybody can command from behind but you can only lead from in front. Like many arrogant rulers Pharaoh let others suffer the consequences of his bad decisions. People who are leaders in government and business today need to be careful before making a decision that affects the lives of those they lead.

**Question:** Do you think the fire was in front of the Egyptians to stall them or behind them to drive them into the sea?

**Challenge:** It cost the first born and most of the Egyptian army to set the Hebrews free — how much is freedom worth to you?

**Scripture:** Exodus 15:1-21