

Marks of Discipleship

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

November 3, 2019

Day 1: Matthew 5:21

‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder;” and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.”

Trusting in God to guide your life can be difficult at times. Jesus is asking us to be in this world but not of the world. Our values and ways of acting, in community, are to come from a different way of thinking than the rest of the world uses. We are to build our relationships on love and humility, not power and pride. Jesus, in this section, is calling us to show mercy instead of punishment, to examine not just our acts but our intent, to make sure we are right with our neighbor before we offer something to God, and to place importance on what is truly important.

Question: Is there a difference between murder and killing?

Challenge: How does this verse connect with the ‘eye for an eye’ concept in the Old Testament?

Scripture: Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5: 17

Day 2: Matthew 5:22

But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool”, you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Anger here is not just an internal feeling but one that causes us to act in a negative way toward our brother or sister. God not only wants us to refrain from killing each other but wants there to be no hostility. It is impossible to completely control our emotions, especially anger?

Question: Do you think this is the same kind of judgment referred to in the above verse?

Challenge: Can you control your feelings of anger? What do you do to prevent yourself from acting with that anger?

Scripture: Luke 6:17-38

Day 3: Matthew 5:23-24

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

The bold statement that Jesus makes is that being reconciled with our brother and sister is more important than worship. In Jesus’ day when you brought an offering it was not money but an animal. One could not leave the animal and travel back home (many times home might be days away) to make up with your neighbor. Jesus is recalling the words of the prophet (Micah 6:6-8) - that the Lord wants justice, not offerings. David in Psalm 51 also declares that God takes no delight in burnt offerings.

Question: If we think of whom we have to be reconciled with - who would you include in the category of brother and sister?

Challenge: Would you not come to worship if you were angry with someone at church?

Scripture: Psalm 51

Day 4: Matthew 5:25-26

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

This worldly wisdom has become, in this context, a testimony of urgency for reconciliation before arriving at the end times. Jesus does not threaten people but does give warnings. Jesus urges us to not put off being reconciled. He has given us advice on how to prevent angry demonstrations and violence between people.

Question: Why do you think it is better to reconcile than to go to court on any issue?

Challenge: Think of a time you were really angry at someone and it did not get resolved. How did you feel and how long did it affect you?

Scripture: Galatians 5:15-25

Day 5: Matthew 5:27-28

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Adultery was (in the Old Testament) an act committed by a married woman by having sexual relations with a man other than her husband. Adultery was a violation of the husband’s right to his wife and the assurance that children born were his own. Both men and women were considered guilty in an adulterous situation. The law prohibition against adultery is one that helps stabilizes a community. Jesus is maintaining that a man’s intentional lustful looking at a woman who is someone else’s wife can cause community upheaval similar to having sexual relations.

Question: Do you think adultery is a moral issue or one that destroys a community?

Challenge: What are the reasons for adultery?

Scripture: II Corinthians 12:15-13:4

Day 6: Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

In both of these incredible sayings Jesus is telling us that if we cannot control something it is better to do without it. If I cannot control my urge to drink alcohol, (and I am an alcoholic), I better not go anywhere where it is served.

Question: Do you think Jesus is serious?

Challenge: Think of this verse not so much in body parts but in attitudes. Do you have to change any of yours?

Scripture: Ephesians 4:21-31

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of Discipleship

November 10, 2019

Day 1: John 15:12

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

Knowing how different the Disciples were from each other makes it a lot harder for us to perform what Jesus is asking. As the first disciples were different individuals, from different backgrounds, so are the disciples of the 21st century. Jesus accepted each one with their doubts (John 20:25), lack of confidence (John 11:7-16) and different requests (Matthew 20:20-21). Jesus loved them by making sure they practiced before He sent them out (Luke 10:1-6). Jesus loved them by correcting them and fulfilled His promise to not forsake them. He promised to be with them and to care for them until the end of the world (Matthew 28:20).

Question: How is this commandment different from *Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and your neighbor as yourself*?

Challenge: Think about how Jesus has loved you and see if you can do likewise with those of the faith.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:35-45

Day 2: John 15:13

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

We read this as a prediction of Jesus' death (and it is), but we need to also read it as a reminder that when we answer the question - What are we willing to die for? - We need to think persons, not things. Jesus is redirecting their ambitions and their hopes for the future toward God's creation and specifically people. In the ancient world stone monuments were built to acknowledge great achievements. Jesus wants our great monuments to be built in individuals, not in stone.

Question: I know it's scripture but do you agree with the statement above?

Challenge: Who can you think of that has died for a friend?

Scripture: I Corinthians 13

Day 3: John 15:14

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

There is a hymn written in 1855 that has a chorus that goes – *O how I love Jesus, because he first loved me*. It is a hymn of appreciation for Jesus' self-sacrifice for our salvation. As with most of the Bible, what we think and say is good, but it is what we do that is important. If we sing - *Oh how I love Jesus* - we should follow those words by something like - *I will show that love by caring for my brothers and sisters in Christ*. The words 'thank you' to Jesus are nice but what is called for is to love one another.

Question: If I do not do what Jesus commands, will that affect my salvation?

Challenge: Think about your friends - who do you love and why?

Scripture: Proverbs 18:19-19:5

Day 4: John 15:15

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

Jesus has given us all the resources we need to be in ministry. He has made it clear that we join with Him in God's work of redemption. Our part is to do the proclamation of the Good News and to care for the people. God in Christ has done the hard part, (the crucifixion and resurrection), now we are to proclaim to the world that God has come to save His people.

Question: Do you think that Jesus means to say that knowledge separates a friend from a servant? If so, why?

Challenge: Think of some situation where knowledge is power. How have you been harmed because you were not given some information?

Scripture: II Kings 5:8-27

Day 5: John 15:16

You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

Bearing fruit is being faithful. Being faithful is expressing the love of God that has been experienced by you, to others in the world you live in. We cannot produce the fruit but we can plant, water, weed and in general tend the plant before, during, and after the fruit appears. God only asks us to do our part. Jesus went to the cross so we do not have to go that far. We are called to plant, water, weed, and tend.

Question: Why do we have to ask in Jesus' name?

Challenge: Are you bearing fruit?

Scripture: John 15:1-17

Day 6: John 15:17

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The command to love and to risk our life means that we are in for a long life of service. We risk our life as we love another regardless of racial background, different beliefs, or different hopes for a meaningful life. Love is (I believe) not accepting anything in a person's life, but placing someone else's best interests above my own.

Question: How many commands has Jesus given in this passage?

Challenge: How is it possible to love a lot of people as Jesus seems to want us to do?

Scripture: John 17

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November 17, 2019

Day 1: Matthew 5:1-3

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

In Matthew, Jesus is most often presented as the Teacher. The Beatitudes (and the Sermon on the Mount) are the longest section of teaching in Matthew. Poor does refer to literal poverty and the sense of one's own need. "Poor in spirit" is a characterization of the true people of God. The true people of God know that they do not control their own lives but are dependent upon God. Though poverty is not ignored by Matthew, the emphasis is not economics or spirituality, but the identity of the people of God. The phrase is descriptive. It describes the people of God and where they will end up - the Kingdom of Heaven.

Question: What reason can you think of for Jesus to go up to a hill to give His talk?

Challenge: Create a "Depend On" chart. This can be a chart that grows. List the things you need in life and put down if you get these needs for self, others or God.

Scripture: Isaiah 30:18-26, 32:16-20

Day 2: Matthew 5:4

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.'

They that mourn are the true people of God who lament the present condition of God's people. They lament that God's Kingdom is not fully experienced by all the people. It is not mourning for a death of someone or something. The sense of the verse is that those who mourn (truly feel bad that God is not experienced by all) will find their yearning satisfied. The satisfaction will come (the comfort) because God will allow them to participate in the Kingdom now even if it is just partial.

Question: How does one become a 'true person of God'?

Challenge: Think of someone this week that is having trouble hoping in general. Try to help them experience the hope you have.

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-11

Day 3: Matthew 5:5

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

This saying of Jesus is not a formula for success or reward. Meekness or gentleness is the reverse upon which the kingdom of the world is built. Power and pride are not the foundations upon which God's Kingdom is built, but rather love and humility. The inheritance of the earth refers to the giving of the land to the children of Israel. The land was the means by which they would find life. In this context inheritance means that they will have a key place in God's Kingdom.

Question: What is your impression of the term "meek" used in this verse?

Challenge: Think of another word for "meek" in this verse and still keep the meaning of the scripture.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 25:15-26:6

Day 4: Matthew 5:6-7

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.'

Righteousness is a state that a person finds themselves in when the judge has declared them innocent. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are longing for the coming of the Kingdom. They hunger and thirst because they have tasted of God's love and want more, not just for themselves, but for all people. Mercy is a sign that God is present. We all want to be treated mercifully because we know that if we received justice we would not be very happy.

Question: Are they "blessed" because they are filled or because they hunger and thirst?

Challenge: If one aspect of mercy is forgiving someone when they are guilty, have you ever shown mercy?

Scripture: Hosea 6:1-6, Matthew 18:23-33

Day 5: Matthew 5:8-9

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Purity of heart is not avoiding impure thoughts but refers to a single-minded devotion to God. It is devotion that is undivided and moving in tune with the plan God has for the redemption of the world. Augustus' rule was sometimes called the Pax Romani or the peace of Rome. There was peace in the region but it came as a result of conquest and fear. Augustus was also called the "son of god." Jesus is purposing that "peacemakers" bring about peace by reconciliation. First reconciling us to God, then out of that reconciliation, us to each other.

Question: When you first read "pure in heart" what did you think it meant?

Challenge: What is the relationship between reconciliation and forgiveness?

Scripture: Psalm 86:11, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Psalm 138:1-6

Day 6: Matthew 5:10-12

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

Blessed is a declaration that certain people are in a privileged, fortunate circumstance. The people of God are in fortunate circumstances because they will be vindicated in the Kingdom of God. In Jesus' resurrection He showed the future of all believers. They would receive a new body and live with God and all God's children in eternity. They are fortunate even in the face of persecutions. This is not a martyr complex but a simple statement of the joy that comes from knowing, by experience, the love of God. If those in the community are persecuted it is a badge of belonging and shows the values of this present age, while the persecuted ones show the values of the age to come.

Question: Can you identify any of the prophets Jesus is talking about?

Challenge: Where are Christians persecuted for Jesus' sake?

Scripture: Romans 4:23-5:8

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November 24, 2019

Day 1: 1 Chronicles 29:6

Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill-offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king's work.

The leaders are the first to make a contribution to the building of the Temple. They are the ones who embody the belief that God's redemption will be accomplished. The Temple is a physical manifestation of the presence of God. Today the Church building is a physical sign of God's presence. It cannot be that sign if there are no people who are in attendance and working to proclaim God's gospel of hope. Years ago churches were built in the middle of towns or on the highest point in town. This was so that God would be in the center of life and that the church would always be seen by those who were far away.

Question: Would you be a leader if it meant making your contribution first? Why or why not?

Challenge: Take a look at your giving - your gifts of time, talent and money. Which one (time, talent, money) do you give more often and which do you think is easier for you to give?

Scripture: Numbers 6:24-7:7

Day 2: 1 Chronicles 29:9

Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the Lord; King David also rejoiced greatly.

Chronicles does not say why they were of one mind or what made them be of one mind. The people saw that their leaders were not in the position of leadership to enrich themselves or get out of work but to get out in front of everybody else and lead. Years ago a pastor told me that the members will run along beside you but not in front of you. Chesty Puller (Marine Corps general) once said you can only lead from in front - you command from behind.

Question: What caused the people to give willingly - the giving of the leaders or their being of one mind?

Challenge: Think about your giving. Do you tend to give to individual causes or do you give to organizations?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 1:8-18

Day 3: 1 Chronicles 29:10-13

Then David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly; David said: 'Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.'

David reminds the assembly that even though they are now embarking on a great building project for God, it is God who gave them the land and the means to build. It was God who gave them the ability and strength to work the land and it is God who will bless their efforts with success, not their own ability. David is giving God the praise for their efforts. David is making sure that the new building points to God, not the builders.

Question: If the earth is the Lord's then what part does human ability play in improving what God has given us?

Challenge: How much of your success in life is due to your abilities and how much to God's gifts to you?

Scripture: Psalm 8

Day 4: 1 Chronicles 29:14

'But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill-offering? For all things come from you and of your own have we given you.'

A free-will offering is one that is not demanded by the Law. There were a number of offerings that the Law demanded to be given over a year's time. This offering was not demanded by God so it is given out of gratitude. The tithe was the responsibility of the people. After the tithe then offerings can be given. Today we confuse the two. We think that anything we give is an offering; when in fact it is after the tithe that our real offering begins. The tithe was expected and everybody knew what the other would give because they knew the worth of each other's land. The offering was done without fanfare and without many knowing what was given. David reminds the assembly that even the free-will offerings, given out of gratitude and love, are because God has given us the ability to give.

Question: Speculate a bit - why is a tenth the amount the Bible asks us to give?

Challenge: Write a definition of the term 'offering.'

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2, Mark 12:41-44, Acts 4:32-37

Day 5: 1 Chronicles 29:15-16

For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.

David's words are echoed in 1 Peter 2:10, once you were no people but now you are a holy nation. God provided for the Israelites during their wandering in the wilderness. God gave them water when it was necessary (it may not have tasted the best) and food before they would starve (and it was boring). God did not give them all they asked for nor did God guarantee a safe passage. God gave them what they needed to make the passage but did not carry them. We need to remember that God will provide what we need as long as we follow God's direction. By the "we" I mean the church of Jesus Christ.

Question: It seems that David is saying that the building represents the investment of all God has given them. Do you agree?

Challenge: How far back can you trace your ancestors?

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4-25

Day 6: 1 Chronicles 29:17

I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.

David has searched his heart and soul and knows that his offering comes from pure gratitude for what God has given to him. He also gives it in the confidence that God will use his offering to bring God's light into the dark places in other lands and peoples. He now rejoices because he sees the assembled people are also giving out of the same attitude he has given. God is pleased with our underlying attitude. The actual offering allows us to feel like we are expressing our gratitude. It is easy to say the words (thank you) but to act on them makes us realize what we really believe.

Question: How does God go about multiplying our giving?

Challenge: Think about your offerings (to any cause) - how do you feel when you give out of guilt (I should give), give out of gratitude or give out of sheer joy?

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:2-12