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**DAILY  
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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# Two Things to Consider When You Follow Jesus

Monday, March 20, 2017

“The idea of having faith in Jesus has come to be totally isolated from being his apprentice and learning how to do what he said.” -Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*.

Have you ever had a personal hero, someone you looked up to and wanted to emulate your life after? Typically, this person is either someone with whom you're close or someone notable. Some people want to emulate their parents, family members, friends, etc. Others want to follow someone they've never met but admired from afar.

When we do attempt to emulate someone, whether intentional or not, we pick up certain behaviors, language, speaking styles, and focus. Of course, emulation can go wrong (it's not hard to find someone who chose to emulate someone who consistently makes poor choices, and then they also make poor choices). However, emulation seems to be an essential call of the Christian in his or her life and thus can be an excellent thing. As Christians, we are called to emulate Christ and his life on earth. While Jesus' death and resurrection are crucial parts of Christianity - without which "Christianity" wouldn't be what it is today - we certainly cannot emulate his death and resurrection (except in the sense of picking up our crosses and dying to ourselves daily) (Matthew 16:24-26). So, how can we emulate Jesus? His calling on our life is to live rightly (Ephesians 4:1-6), live honorably toward God, and bring his message to the entire earth (Matthew 28:19-20).

How do we do this? If this is the call of the Christian, how do we begin to ask ourselves if we're emulating Christ properly?

The first step, especially in our cultural context, is to behold Jesus for who he is. Our culture has reduced Jesus to being a good moral teacher. Some say he taught some great things, but got some other things wrong. Instead, as Dallas Willard says in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*,

He is not just nice, he is brilliant. He is the smartest man who ever lived. He is now supervising the entire course of world history (Revelation 1:5) while simultaneously preparing the rest of the universe for our future role in it (John 14:2). He always has the best information on everything and certainly also on the things that matter most in human life. Let us

now hear his teachings on who has the good life, on who is among the truly blessed.

This is why we want to emulate Jesus.

Knowing these things about Jesus compels us to live a certain way. We can see this in his first interaction with a few of his disciples.

### **Mark 1:16-20**

*<sup>16</sup>One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. <sup>17</sup>Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" <sup>18</sup>And they left their nets at once and followed him. <sup>19</sup>A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. <sup>20</sup>He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.*

As Ben Snyder said this past weekend, Jesus expands our faith as we respond to these two questions:

1. What do I need to drop?
2. What do I need to pick up?

In today's passage, Jesus calls four of his soon-to-be disciples: Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John. In these five short verses, we can see how the disciples responded to Jesus' call to follow, which can serve as a guide for our response.

First, we need to ask, "**What do I need to drop?**"

What did they drop? Physically, they dropped their nets. But that's not all. They were potentially leaving their jobs – their livelihood, their financial security. They were fishermen. They knew what their job entailed, and since it was a family business, they had known this for quite some time. To follow Jesus, they had to be willing to leave this.

Next, we need to ask, "**What do I need to pick up?**"

Following Jesus isn't about simply dropping certain behaviors, actions, etc. No, it must be a lot more than that. If it were only about restricting ourselves from certain things, then Jesus' promise to give us a rich and satisfying life (John 10:10) would have been a lie. The call to be a disciple of Jesus - to be a

follower of Jesus - is the greatest call one can have. For Simon, Andrew, James, and John, Jesus' call was to drop certain things, yes, but these things paled in comparison to the life he was calling them to live.

So, what did they pick up?

They picked up a new leader - Jesus. One who had been preaching the coming of the Kingdom of God. They picked up new friends, a new story, and the opportunity to be a part of the greatest story in the history of humanity.

This moment with Jesus changed their lives forever, and it continues to change lives thousands of years later. Their response to Jesus' call demands that we ask these questions: What do I need to drop? What do I need to pick up?

Ben challenged us to think about three spiritual disciplines: reading, serving, and giving.

To improve in each of these disciplines, we must drop certain things and pick up others.

For reading, we may have to drop the time we spend watching TV, scrolling through social media, or perhaps even that extra hour of sleep, to pick up our Bibles and spend time digesting the incredible word of God. One easy way to do that this series is to follow along with our [Mark reading plan](#).

For serving, we may have to drop some of the same activities listed above to give our time to those we can bless with the time God has given us.

For giving, we may have to drop some spending habits to have the heart of giving that God has called us to.

Simply put, Jesus never asked us to follow him casually. As Ben said, "how we follow reveals the depth of our faith." His call to pick up our cross daily was both a call to drop and to pick up.

As you pray about and reflect on today's passage, consider the two questions and answer this:

How can you improve in the three spiritual disciplines (reading, serving, and giving) we talked about?

What steps do you need to take this week?

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, you sent your Son to die for me and to call me to a new life. Help me to live a life that will honor you and what you did through your Son here on earth. Help me to drop and pick up the necessary behaviors, actions, and anything else I need to so that I can follow you. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

# Could You Do More?

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

During the 1990s, the slogan, “What Would Jesus Do?” was popularized in the U.S. For more than 25 years, the slogan and the “WWJD” bracelets it spawned have served as a means of reminding Christ-followers to live their faith through their actions. While the slogan – and sentiment – are constructive, it may be even more worthwhile to consider another question: “What has Jesus done for me?”

As part of the Holy Trinity, Jesus is responsible for our very creation. As Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians, all things were created through Jesus: “For through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth ... Everything was created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16).

Jesus has also equipped us with gifts to serve him, and one another. He serves as both compass and guide in our walk with him. He loves and comforts us – in good times and bad, and gives us confidence and strength even in (and particularly in) life’s valleys. And through his death on the cross, he has given us the promise of salvation and eternal life with him.

What then, is the appropriate response for us as recipients of these incredible blessings?

The story of Jesus’ visit to the home of Simon (Simon was renamed Peter in Mark 3:16) provides the answer. In Mark 1:29-31, Jesus was accompanied by James and John, the sons of Zebedee, on a visit to the home of Simon and his brother, Andrew. There he found Simon’s mother-in-law bedridden with a high fever. Jesus immediately grasped her hand and cured her illness.

Matthew Henry writes in his commentary on Mark 1, “how complete the cure was; when the fever left her, it did not, as usual, leave her weak, but the same hand that healed her, strengthened her, so that she was able to minister to them.”

In fact, upon being healed, Simon’s mother-in-law served Jesus and his disciples by preparing a meal for them.

Just like Simon’s mother-in-law, we too have been healed by Jesus. He heals us and strengthens our minds, our hearts, and our bodies. And through his undeserved gift of salvation, he even heals our sins.

The natural response of Simon's mother-in-law to the healing of Jesus was to serve. Why should our reaction be any different? As noted in yesterday's post, salvation comes from faith alone. But the authenticity of our faith is revealed in our willingness to follow and serve him.

Indeed, after all he's done for us, serving Jesus is the least – *and the most* – we can do. Which leads to one final question: What have you done for Jesus?

**Mark 1:29-31**

*<sup>29</sup> After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.*

Consider what Jesus has done for you – and what you are doing in response. What can you begin doing – or do more fully – to serve him?

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son and his countless blessings to us. His love is unconditional, his healing is undeniable, and his salvation is unfathomable. Help us to recognize and appreciate these incredible gifts, and to respond by serving Jesus with a passion that is both earnest and joyful. Amen.*

This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular contributor to and editor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

# Fixer Upper and Forgiving Sins

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

On a recent trip to Waco, Texas, my friend, our daughters, and I discussed what we would say or do if we were able to meet Chip or Joanna Gaines. For *Fixer Upper* fans, just seeing them would be a big deal. One of the security guards we chatted with at the Magnolia Silos said that some people couldn't manage to take a picture of the building because they are so excited to be there. Often, he would have to take the camera from them to take a picture so that it wouldn't be blurry due to their hands shaking with excitement.

Imagine the excitement of the people in Jesus' time. He had performed some miracles, and everybody wanted to see, hear, or just be near him. The house was packed with visitors, and there was no more room. Some men had a friend that was paralyzed, and since they couldn't get him in the door, they decided to tear off a section of the roof. After the new skylight had been constructed in the roof above Jesus' head, the men lowered the man on his mat down in front of Jesus. Jesus saw that this man's friends had worked together to get the man to him. Instead of complaining about the mess they'd made, Jesus spoke to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven." Now, this caused a major problem with the teachers of the religious law who were there listening. This wasn't what they expected Jesus to do. He could have signed some autographs and taken some selfies with the paralyzed man since he was famous and all. Instead, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven, which was something only God could do.

We get excited about meeting celebrities, but we have access to Jesus every day and often aren't near as excited. Jesus knew the Pharisee's hearts just like he knows our hearts. We want Jesus when we want Jesus, yet he wants us all the time. We might make our appearances at church because people will see us there. We might post on social media that we will pray for someone because it is the Christian thing to do. But do we study the Bible and pray to deepen our relationship with Jesus when no one is looking?

Like many Christians, I struggle with these things. I want my relationship with Jesus to be real. I want to get excited about reading my Bible and praying to him. I know he is God and he's a part of my life, and that is way more exciting than someone on television. How excited are you about seeing Jesus this week?



## **Mark 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. <sup>2</sup>Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, <sup>3</sup>four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. <sup>4</sup>They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

<sup>6</sup>But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, <sup>7</sup>"What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"

<sup>8</sup>Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? <sup>9</sup>Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'? <sup>10</sup>So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, <sup>11</sup>"Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"

<sup>12</sup>And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!"

Have you ever been caught up in the excitement of meeting a celebrity? How do you think people reacted to meeting Jesus for the first time? Do you get excited about reading the Bible, going to church, and praying, or is it something you do more so out of obligation?

## **PRAYER**

Thank God for his forgiveness of your sins. Tell him how excited you are to get to know him better through his word and a relationship through his Son, Jesus.

# When You're a Control Freak

Thursday, March 24, 2017

You know those people who take the simplest task and turn it into an art form? Like laundry – the whites and color clothes must be sorted. Washed separately, dried, and then it gets hard. The undies and socks get made into different piles. Dressier shirts and sweaters are in a separate pile. Undershirts and casual shirts are two more piles. Men, women and children's clothes are all separate mini piles. Do not wash kitchen laundry with the clothes laundry. Then it gets even harder – dress shirts get folded into eighths into symmetrical squares. Jeans get creased in the middle and folded into thirds. If the undershirts aren't folded so that they make a streamline stack in the drawer, then it's all got to be pulled out and done again. Also, all the wash must be completed on Friday afternoon no later than 3 pm so that wrinkles won't set in over the weekend. Wasn't the original point of the exercise to just have clean clothes?! When did it get so complicated?! We've lovingly called folks who do this “control freaks.” Control freaks are fantastic at keeping records, being on a schedule, and knowing every detail. They can be excellent references! The downside of being a control freak is that we sometimes lose the joy and original purpose of the task being accomplished, from something as mundane as laundry to life in general. Control freaks date way back to before Jesus' time, with the Pharisees.

God warned the Jews that they must observe the Sabbath, or he would not protect them from their enemies. Sure enough, both Israel and Judah fell because of the disobedience of its people. Several centuries before Christ, the Pharisees were determined they would not mess up again regarding Sabbath Law. They were so determined that they turned into control freaks. Laws were analyzed and broken down into a long list of rules that were never intended originally for the Sabbath day. For example – one could tie a knot on the Sabbath, but only the kind that can be untied with one hand. You also couldn't walk on grass because the blades broke, which would be like threshing, which is laborious work. These minute laws took the blessing out of the Sabbath and made it a new type of burden for Jews to observe it “properly.”

When Jesus came to practice his ministry, his first mission was to restore hope, healing and the blessing of the Sabbath day, reminding the people “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

### **Mark 3:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup>Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand.<sup>2</sup> Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup> Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone."<sup>4</sup> Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.<sup>5</sup> He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored!<sup>6</sup> At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.*

The Pharisees were so upset that Jesus broke the rules they had made that they missed the miracle he performed in front of their eyes.

Is there something that you focus on so much that you, too, miss God's blessing?

What do you need to do to refocus and let go of the legalism you may be hiding behind?

### **PRAYER**

*Dear Lord, thank you for giving us the blessing of a Sabbath day of rest, repair, faith, hope, healing, and joy. Let us work to carry this blessing into all other days, removing our personal agendas and focusing on what you want for us! In Jesus' name, amen.*

# How Gardening Relates to Your Spiritual Life

Friday, March 25, 2017

Happy spring! It may not feel like it, but spring technically started five days ago.

With spring often come thoughts of gardening and growth. Some plants will start growing on their own as the snow thaws. However, any gardener knows that most fruits and vegetables need to be planted and cared for to harvest any produce later.

Our spiritual health isn't so different from a vegetable garden. Like gardening, the Gospel must be planted in our hearts and nurtured to produce the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). However, before a gardener can even start to plant, they must consider the soil they're planting in.

In the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9), Jesus talks about different types of spiritual "soil."

## **Mark 4:1-9**

*<sup>1</sup>Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. <sup>2</sup>He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: <sup>3</sup>"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. <sup>4</sup>As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. <sup>5</sup>Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup>But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. <sup>8</sup>Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" <sup>9</sup>Then he said, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."*

Have you not been seeing all the results of the Gospel that you had hoped for in your life? Before worrying about the seed, consider the soil. Have you allowed negative influences to snatch the seed away? Have you not given

room in your life for the seed to take root? Have you been allowing worries to crowd the seed, keeping it from flourishing?

If any of these sound like you, it's time to get out your spiritual trowel. The Gospel is a powerful message, but it requires care and attention to thrive. Take the time to consider what might be disrupting the growth of God's word in your own heart, whether it be negativity from others, an unwillingness to change, financial worries, or something else entirely. Then, dig whatever it is out. It won't be easy, but remember, when the seed of the Gospel is allowed to grow unencumbered, it can produce a crop of "thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" (Mark 4:8)

### **PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the seed that is your Word. We pray that you would give us fruitful hearts, where your Word can grow and spread to the lives of others. If there is something keeping your Word from producing spiritual fruit in our lives, we ask you to help us identify it and remove it. We know that only through you can the Gospel create positive change in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*