



FOLLOW.

Gospel of Luke Daily Devotional

Rev. Joshua Rhone

Congratulations! You are a disciple of Jesus Christ!

Jesus led his first disciples so that they would one day be able to lead disciples of their own who one day would be able to lead disciples of their own. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we follow Jesus' teachings and His example. Jesus is in charge. He is our teacher, mentor, commanding officer, and guide. We surrender our right to decide for ourselves. We surrender our right to be in control. From this moment on, we live our lives for Him. His purpose is our purpose. His mission is our mission. His life is our life. His heart is our heart. His mind is our mind. Jesus is not just a large part of our lives; our lives only have meaning in His. If you are new to Jesus, or if God has been, up until now, something you've done once a week on Sunday, you are in for the adventure of a lifetime! You are about to surrender everything to Jesus and find a life more meaningful than anything you have every known!

Christian writer Bill Hull, in his book *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, gives one of the best explanations of how we become disciples by observing how Jesus taught the original twelve disciples.

1. A disciple submits to a teacher who teaches how to follow Jesus.
2. A disciple learns the words of Jesus.
3. A disciple learns Jesus' way of ministry.
4. A disciple imitates Jesus' life and character.
5. A disciple finds and teaches other disciples to follow Jesus.

In the ninety days that follow, we will walk with Jesus through all four gospels. You will read one chapter per day, paying close attention to what Jesus said and did in order to imitate Him. Every day, your life will change as you decide to "FOLLOW."

Synoptic: “seeing the whole together at a glance.”

Luke is one of three Synoptic Gospels, along with Matthew and Mark. Not surprisingly, this means that Luke’s account of the good news chronicles many of the same events that we have already experienced in both Matthew and Mark. To say that they recount many of the same events, is not to say that Luke is unoriginal or lacks uniqueness. In fact, Luke’s Gospel has many distinctives, which make it undeniably unique. One distinctive of Luke’s Gospel is the lengthy nature of his accounts. For instance, Mark devotes one chapter (10) to Jesus’ ministry in Pera and Judea, whereas Luke devotes almost ten chapters to this season of Jesus’ ministry. Another noteworthy distinctive of Luke’s Gospel is how he talks about Jesus. He presents Jesus as the Son of Man, who is wholly God and wholly human. Where Matthew saw Jesus as the Messiah-King, and Mark presents Jesus as the Servant-Savior, Luke sees Jesus as the God-Man. Undoubtedly, these, and a few others of Luke’s distinctive features, likely stem from the fact that he had a unique audience: Gentile Greeks, who needed to be assured that they were being included in God’s glorious plan of redemption.

Luke addresses his Gospel to a man by the name of Theophilus—his name means “friend or lover of God.” Luke gives this account of the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus so that Theophilus might know with certainty the things that he has been instructed regarding. In other words, Luke provides this supposedly new convert with historical information and carefully documented teaching that would confirm what he has heard about Christ, thus solidifying his faith.

My prayer for you this Lenten season, as we journey together through Luke, is that you would find your faith strengthened and deepened, as you encounter the God-Man, Jesus, who seeks and saves that which was lost (Lk 19.10).

February 14: Read Luke 1

As human beings we assume things. We take certain things for granted. For example, we assume when we put a half gallon of ice cream in the freezer that it will remain suitably chilled until we retrieve it, to scoop some into a bowl to eat. We take for granted when we turn the handle on the faucet that water will come forth, filling our glass or enabling us to wash our hands.

The problem with assumptions is that the things we take for granted sometimes disappoint. The freezer becomes unplugged, the condenser fails, and our yummy chilled ice cream is an oozing, sugary, sticky mess. The pipes freeze, an o-ring fails, a pipe bursts and disappointment ensues as we turn the handle and no water flows forth.

When it comes to matters of faith, there are certain assumptions we have. We take for granted that God operates in particular ways. As Luke's Gospel unfolds, some of those assumptions get challenged right off the bat. Many times, we assume that God speaks to devout religious leaders and that they, in turn, respond in obedience. Zechariah is one of those whom we expect God to talk to. As a member of the priestly line, we expect him not only to hear God's voice, but to listen in faith and do whatever God says with obedience.

God speaks. He tells Zechariah that he and his wife Elizabeth are going to have the child that they have always wanted. After hearing God's voice, Zechariah does not rejoice. He does not run home to tell his wife. Instead, he objects. He insists that God must have the wrong person— "for I am an old man."

The consequence of Zechariah's disbelief and arguing with God was that he was unable to speak until the day his son was born.

Here is the crazy part: God also spoke, by way of an angel, to a young girl by the name of Mary. Unlike Zechariah and Elizabeth, she's not been wanting a child. In fact, a child at this

point in her life and relationship, would not be a good thing—it would ruin things with Joseph and put her life at risk. But guess what the angel comes to tell her... That's right, although she's a virgin, she will conceive and give birth to very God of very God, Jesus.

What is even more astounding is how Mary responds. She doesn't argue. She doesn't object. Instead, she humbly accepts the role that God has given her to play and wells up with gratitude at what God is doing.

REFLECTION:

Do you believe that God still speaks today? If so, who do you believe that God speaks to?

Have you ever heard God's voice? If so, what did God say to you?

Does the thought of hearing God's voice excite or frighten you? Why?

What is one thing that you can do to create space and remove distractions, so that you might hear God's voice more clearly?

February 15: Read Luke 2

If we were to compose a list of our favorite biblical characters, I am relatively sure who would make the list. Jesus, Moses, Noah, Paul, Priscilla and Aquilla, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus are just some of the names that I imagine would make the list, and rightfully so. After all, we know these characters. We are familiar with their stories. Some unnamed characters might even make the list, such as the Magi from the East and the shepherds who were tending their flocks by night. Again, theirs are familiar stories.

Stories that preach well. Stories that we can draw application for our own lives from.

Simeon likely wouldn't make the list, however. We don't know much about him. Not much time is devoted to his story. In fact, his story is often overlooked, as we pay attention to two bigger, more interesting stories that are on either side: the birth of Jesus and Jesus' parents inadvertently leaving him behind at the Temple when he was a boy. But I like Simeon. His story, while brief, is an important one. His trust in God and faithful obedience to God's leading while not overly dramatic, evidences what so much of discipleship entails. Simeon understands that trusting God and following God with faithful obedience is not a one-time thing, a one-time decision. Rather, to borrow Eugene Peterson's masterful phrase, discipleship is "a long obedience in the same direction." For Simeon that meant waiting eagerly and faithfully each day to see if the Messiah, attested to by the Holy Spirit, had arrived. It meant remaining vigilant and alert, waiting for the Holy Spirit to lead him to the Temple when the time came. It meant faithfully attending to the role that God had given him in the story that God was writing. It wasn't a glamorous role, but he had a part to play.

REFLECTION:

As you look at your life, who do you have more in common with: your favorite biblical character or Simeon?

God might not ask you to part the Red Sea or build an ark, but He might ask you to play a small, but important part, in the story that He is writing. Are you willing to play the small part? Are you willing to follow God with faithfulness and do whatever He asks you to do?

Simeon was a patient man. He heard God's voice, received God's promise, and persisted in waiting. Are you willing to wait for God's timing, to do what God has called you to?

February 16: Read Luke 3

John the Baptizer is a bit of an odd character. As a child, I remember the flannel graph lessons about John. He was depicted as having long hair and wearing a tunic that appeared to be made of a material like a rough, itchy burlap. Often, he was pictured as standing in or beside the river, his arms outstretched, as he clearly articulated a message that he was passionate about. By all accounts, he looked rough—someone you wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley; but his eyes always struck me as kind, even compassionate.

Looking back, I think those flannel graph makers did a pretty good job of capturing John's essence. After all, he was a camel-hair wearing, locust and wild honey eating man. I'm sure his appearance was a bit rough and not the least bit metropolitan. Yet, there was something attractive about him. People came from far and wide to hear him speak and to be baptized by him.

Undoubtedly, John was a rather unique character, but it was his message that really set him apart. He preached and taught about a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Lk 3.3). Those of the Jewish tradition were familiar with ceremonial purification rites, which entailed washing with water so that a person might be declared pure. These rites resulted in a ceremonial sort of purity, rather than the changing and transforming of the heart. What John was calling the people to, however, was deeper. He called for a baptism coupled with repentance. True repentance. Not simply saying, "I'm sorry," but continuing to do wrong. Not just washing away the dirt, only to go jump in the proverbial mud puddle again. Not just whispering, "Forgive me," only to continue sinning.

John rightly recognized that what God desires is a total renovation of the heart—a renovation that God, in grace, makes possible. Yet, while the total transformation of the heart is a change

that only God can truly make, there are changes that we must make before that transformation can occur. We must change our minds about sin. Repentance is that change of mind. It is a determination, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to acknowledge the sins that we have committed; the damage that our sins have caused; and our desire to turn from our sin and toward God.

REFLECTION:

As you look at your life, have you been honest with yourself and God regarding your sin(s)?

When it comes to being honest about your sin, have you simply said, “I’m sorry,” and asked for forgiveness? Or have you truly repented—acknowledging your sin, the damage it has done, and determining, with God’s help, to live differently?

Is there anything you need to repent of today? If so, before you do anything else, take some time to confess and repent of your sin.

February 17: Read Luke 4

Often, when we think of homecomings, we think of heartwarming reunions, during which tears are shed, hugs exchanged, and tales of the past shared, punctuated with claps of uproarious laughter. At first, Jesus’ return to his hometown appears to be rather mundane and ordinary. He goes to the synagogue where he worshiped as a boy and is extended the opportunity to read from the scroll, sharing some explanatory remarks, if he so chooses.

The scroll that Jesus read from was that of the prophet Isaiah—one of Israel’s most respected and revered prophets. The section that he read from would have been very familiar to the audience. It was a beloved passage that spoke of God’s judgment

upon Israel's enemies and redemption for God's people. In the preceding section, Isaiah had declared that a Redeemer, anointed of God, would carry out this work.

That's why it was so shocking when Jesus, the hometown kid, who many had known from the time that he was knee-high-to-a-grasshopper, added a small, but rather important statement after the reading: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Lk 4.21)."

Understandably, the audience didn't know how to respond. From our perspective, what Jesus has done is clear: He has just articulated his God-given mission. He has come to preach good news to the poor; proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to release the oppressed; and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. But, those who were listening that day weren't so sure. Yes, they were amazed. Yes, they spoke well of him. But, in the end, they drive him out of town and attempt to throw him off the cliff.

Sometimes the good news isn't received with gladness. Sometimes the best news in all the world is rejected, just as those of Jesus' hometown rejected him. Sometimes the news that God is doing a new thing seems threatening because it means that the old (and familiar) will be gone and the new will replace it.

REFLECTION:

Are you excited by the prospect that God is doing something new?

Where do you see the signs of newness around you?

How might you participate in what God is doing in the world?

February 18: Read Luke 5

In a devotional entitled “Follow” it would seem obvious to spend today looking at the invitation that Jesus gives to some fishermen and a tax collector to follow him and partner with him in his work in the world. While it is tempting to do so, I would like to encourage you to cast your gaze in a slightly different, but related, direction today.

Already in Luke’s Gospel, we have seen that Jesus teaches with a power and authority that is unlike anything the people have seen to this point. They are amazed and astounded not only by Jesus’ message, but by the authoritative way that he conveyed his message. The Truth proclaiming the truth of God opens eyes, unstops ears, and changes lives.

In Luke 5, we are introduced to a man with leprosy. The unnamed man comes to Jesus and calls out, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean (Lk 5.12, NIV).” Jesus responds to the man’s call by stating his willingness and proving his ability to heal. Jesus is willing and able. He is up to the task. His power is limitless.

Truth and power, if not tempered by love and compassion, can easily turn people off. Think about the many abuses of power that have been reported over recent months—men, who have used their position and power, to exploit others; abusing those who they should be protecting. Truth also has the potential to undo, to harm. That haircut is awful—it may be a true statement, but that doesn’t mean that it doesn’t sting. You’ve been walking around, all day, with spinach in your teeth—it’s a true statement, but it doesn’t make it any less humiliating.

Jesus, who is the Truth and who is all powerful, knows that truth and power need to be tempered by love and compassion. In his life and ministry, truth and power are put on display, but they are always coupled with loving compassion. As a result, people are

drawn to him. He has the ability to change their lives for the better, and because he is compassionate, Jesus is willing to help.

Sometimes we have the ability to help but are unwilling to do so. Sometimes we want to help but do not have the ability or capacity to do so.

We serve One who is willing and able. One who is calling people to follow him, to join with him in his work and the work of his kingdom. You may not feel up to the task but know this: He who has called you is able. If God has called you, He will give you all that you need to faithfully live out that calling.

REFLECTION:

Who has God put in your life for you to share the good news of Jesus Christ with?

Does your heart break, with compassion, for the person (or people) that God has put in your life for you to minister to? If not, ask God to make your heart beat with compassion and love.

Do you feel up to the task of sharing the good news with them in word and deed? If not, ask God to give you the strength, boldness, and any other help you might need.

February 19: Read Luke 6

One of the things that I love about Luke's Gospel is how he writes about Jesus' relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

Already, Luke has recorded how Jesus was filled with and full of the Spirit, and how he was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. God the Son draws strength from and relies upon the Holy Spirit for direction.

Now, in chapter 6, we find Jesus making an important decision. He is about to select the Twelve Apostles—the Twelve people who he will spend most of his time with, teaching them about God’s kingdom, preparing them to partner with him in his work, and equipping them to continue his work when he ascends to the Father. Faced with that decision, Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God (Lk 6.12, NRSV).”

Pause, for a moment, and let that sink in.

God the Son spends the entire evening talking to God the Father, seeking the Father’s wisdom and counsel, regarding an important decision. It is something Jesus will do repeatedly, throughout Luke’s Gospel, especially at pivotal moments.

If God the Son felt this was necessary and important, what does that say about the necessity of prayer for you and me?

REFLECTION:

As you face important decisions in life, how do you process them? Do you make a list of pro’s and con’s? Do you solicit advice from your spouse, parents, or a trusted friend? Do you take time to pray?

Without knowing what Jesus and the Father talked about, what does the fact that Jesus spent the entire evening in prayer convey regarding the serious nature of the decision that is being made?

Have you ever spent an entire evening in prayer?

What is currently transpiring in your life, or in the life of someone that you love, that might warrant spending an entire evening, or a few evenings, in prayer?

February 20: Read Luke 7

The power of Jesus is once again on display in today's chapter. Jesus heals a centurion's son and raises a widow's son back to life. The miraculous nature of both healings serves as a testimony to the power and authority of Jesus. Clearly, nothing—neither illness nor death—is impossible for God.

The healing of the centurion's son also points to the fact that God is at work and moving outside of Israel. In fact, Jesus extols the centurion's faith, claiming that he has not seen faith like this even in Israel. There is a wideness in God's grace, so that even those outside the ethnic boundaries of God's chosen people are recipients of God's grace and compassion!

The story of the sinful woman, which anchors the chapter, serves as a further example of these themes. Jesus is not put off by the sinful woman and her behavior. Where Simon the Pharisee and his guests are perturbed by this woman, her reputation, and her over-the-top behavior; Jesus is moved by her extravagant love. He, then, forgives her sins.

Jesus' power is all-encompassing. With him, and for him, nothing is impossible. Broken bodies can be healed. The dead can be raised. Sins can be forgiven. Jesus' love and compassion for the sick, poor, marginalized, broken, and heart-sick is not understood by some. By others, it is misunderstood. But to those whose lives are changed, Jesus' love and compassion is greeted by extravagant love that cannot be contained.

REFLECTION:

Who is Jesus to you? A healer? Your source of hope? A friend?

As you think about who Jesus is and what he has done for you, do you find your heart welling up and overflowing with joy? How might you express that joy to God?

What is one way that you can extravagantly love someone else, so that, in so doing, they might experience God's love in a tangible?

February 21: Read Luke 8

Crowds → 120 → 70 → 12 → 3. This progression is indicative of Jesus' approach to leadership and how he went about making disciples.

Crowds. There were many who were a part of the multitude. People who came to hear Jesus speak. People who came to watch as he performed miracles. They would come for an afternoon—possibly staying around for a day or two. But the crowds would return home. They didn't stay with Jesus. He came in and out of their lives, and their commitment to him varied.

The 120. According to Acts 1.15, there were approximately one hundred and twenty people in the upstairs room in the days leading up to Pentecost. They were committed followers of Jesus. People whose commitment was greater than that of the crowds. They had been around for much of Jesus' ministry. They had a vested interest in the work of God's kingdom. They had a growing relationship with God and a hunger and thirst for the things of God, which is why they had dedicated themselves to prayer and earnestly awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The 70. Fast forward a few chapters to Luke 10. Jesus will appoint and send out seventy of his followers to go ahead of him, partnering with him, as laborers for the harvest.

The 12. We know them as the apostles, whom Jesus spends the majority of his three-year ministry with. He walks, talks, and instructs these individuals, preparing them to carry on his work, after the Ascension. These will be the primary stewards of Jesus' mission, providing leadership to the early church, in the years immediately following Jesus' ascension to heaven, to sit at the right hand of the Father.

The 3. Peter, James, and John had access to Jesus that no one else did. They accompanied Jesus to the top of the mountain and experienced his transfiguration. They enjoyed private times of teaching and instruction to which none of Jesus' other followers were privy.

In Luke 8, we see a similar pattern at work. When it comes to following Christ there are varying levels of commitment. Being in the crowd and admiring Jesus from a distance is easy. To be a fan of his healings, teachings, and overall ministry requires minimal investment. It's convenient. You can come and go as you please.

There are those who choose to go deeper, however. Some chose to follow because Jesus had changed their lives: the Mary Magdalene's, the Joanna's and Susanna's of the world (Lk 8.2-3). God's amazing love, which they had experienced, demanded, to borrow the words of Isaac Watts, their soul, their life, their all.

There were still others, who gave up everything, walking away from their fishing nets and tax booths, to follow Jesus. They heard the call to follow and it so resonated with them that they chose to let Christ's agenda become their agenda and his way of life to become their way of life. When Jesus spoke, they didn't just listen. They absorbed and internalized his teachings, allowing them to change and transform them.

REFLECTION:

Crowds → Followers → Disciples. If you were to honestly assess your commitment to Jesus, his mission, and the work of God’s kingdom, which of the three groups would you be in?

What next step of faith would you have to take to take one step closer to becoming a fully formed, wholly committed disciple of Jesus?

What kind of help, and what sort of accountability, would be needed for you to take that next step?

February 22: Read Luke 9

Apprentices commit to learning a craft or trade by submitting to and learning from master. The relationship between master and apprentice often has three stages.

Stage 1: I do, you watch. The master adeptly plies her trade, doing what she does with expertise and precision. The apprentice watches, takes notes, and asks questions in the hope of understanding exactly what it is that the master is doing and why.

Stage 2: I do, you help. The master continues to adeptly do her work. The apprentice now moves from taking notes, to getting their hands dirty. They help, often in small ways, but they are getting some hands-on experience.

Stage 3: You do. I help. We talk. The apprentice now takes on most of the duties and responsibilities associated with doing the job. The master helps, as needed, clarifying roles and responsibilities; providing wisdom and insight about how things can be tweaked and improved. The master and apprentice discuss and debrief what has taken place.

Stage 4: You do. I watch. We talk. Similar to the previous stage. Only this time, the apprentice takes full responsibility and the

master observes without offering critique or help. The master and apprentice debrief and remain in contact, but they now share wholly in the work.

Stage 5: You do. Someone else watches. The apprentice becomes the teacher: recruiting, training, equipping and deploying others for the work.

In Luke 9, the Twelve's relationship with Jesus has matured to Stage 4. Jesus sends the Twelve out on their own, imbued with his authority, to do his work. They are to go from village to village, preaching and healing, just as he has done time and again before their very eyes. In verse 10, they return and report back to Jesus all that has taken place. They debrief the mission.

REFLECTION:

As you reflect on your journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ, which stage do you find yourself in? Are you watching as and learning as someone else engages in the work of ministry? Are you assisting someone as they engage in ministry? Are you to the point of engaging in ministry, as someone provides a little guidance? Are you to the point where you are the point-person, who from time to time reports back to and debriefs the ministry with someone else? Or, are you to the point of recruiting, training, equipping, and deploying others for ministry?

If you find yourself in Stages 1-4, what would need to happen for you to take your next step, taking on more responsibility in the work of God's kingdom? Who can help you take that next step?

If you find yourself in Stage 5, take some time to identify a handful of individuals (3-5 is a good number) to invite into an intentional process of discipleship. Pray over the list, at least until we finish reading through Luke's Gospel, and then invite

those people into an intentional process where they can take their next step to employ their gifts and talents in service to God and His kingdom.

February 23: Read Luke 10

Jesus has resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem (Lk 9.51). He is on a mission. A mission that includes everything that he has been doing, and everything that he will do. Yet, it is a mission that will ultimately take him to Jerusalem, culminating in the events of Holy Week.

In Luke 10, we find Jesus focusing on that mission with laser-like intensity. He is also inviting others to partner with him in that work, sharing his vision (Lk 10.1-24).

Getting to the point where we have and maintain laser-like focus can be challenging. Just ask Mary and Martha. At the end of the tenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus comes to their home. Martha rushes about, busily making sure that every detail and preparation is attended to. Mary, however, sits. She rejects the hustle, bustle, and activity, choosing to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen.

Sitting and listening: these are two things that in our fast-paced, often frantic culture, we aren't very good at. In fact, to sit and listen seems like a waste of valuable time—time that could be spent *doing*; time that could be spent *producing*; time that could be utilized to *accomplish* that one more thing that each of us has on our to-do lists.

You get the idea.

Now, back to Mary and Martha. Poor Martha often gets beat up and criticized for her worry and being upset about many things.

But, let's be honest, she's done a good thing. She's welcomed Jesus into her home. She's treated him with warmth and hospitality. She's exhausted herself trying to make him comfortable.

Mary, by contrast, has, according to Jesus, done the better thing. She's focused on what truly matters. She's prioritized her relationship with Jesus—knowing him and being known by him—over *doing* this thing or that for him.

The whole scenario reminds me of Jesus' discussion with his disciples in John 15, where he asserts numerous times that they (and we) are to abide in Christ.

While being a disciple of Jesus means partnering with him in the work of God's kingdom, we need to be cautious that in our zeal to *do* things for Christ that we don't inadvertently become so busy that we can no longer find the time to *abide* with Christ—to sit and spend time with him, just enjoying his presence.

REFLECTION:

If you were to be honest with yourself, which is easier: *doing* things for Jesus or *abiding* and *being* with Jesus?

The tension between *doing* and *being* is not so much about determining which is good and which is bad, as it is about understanding which is *better* at a particular time. As you think about the season of life that you currently find yourself in, which posture (activity or rest, doing or abiding) seems like the better and more necessary posture?

What is one thing that you can do, today, to engage with Jesus in this way?

February 24: Read Luke 11

God the Son enjoyed talking to and spending time with God the Father. As we noted on February 19, Jesus regularly spends time in

prayer, especially in the hours and days before making key and crucial decision.

As the eleventh chapter of Luke's Gospel unfolds, we find Jesus praying in a certain place (Lk 11.1). Luke does not tell us which particular place this was, although we know that Jesus was known to pray at various places: on the mountain, in a garden, and near the seashore. He frequented these places.

As understudies and apprentices of Jesus, the Jesus' disciples were striving to imitate Jesus. Since prayer was a practice that he regularly engaged in, it was a practice that they, too, wanted to engage in. So, one disciple—we're not told who—asked Jesus to teach them. After all, John had taught his disciples to pray; so why shouldn't Jesus, their master, do the same?!

What Jesus teaches them is what we have come to know as "The Lord's Prayer," or the, "Our Father," although the prayer as we pray it differs slightly from the one Jesus taught to his followers. It is a model prayer that teaches us much about the way that we relate to God and the types of things that we can talk to God about. The prayer even helps us to understand that it is okay to talk to God about both our needs and the needs of others.

There is a lot that we could say about this prayer, its substance, and the posture of our hearts and lives as we pray the prayer. However, that conversation is much too big to have here.

What is interesting is that having provided his disciples with a model prayer, Jesus moves on to a conversation about the underlying issues of prayer. By way of a series of examples, Jesus teaches his disciples about the importance of persistence in prayer, as well as the reason that they should have confidence as they talk to God in prayer. In short, we might say that Jesus teaches his disciples that prayer is a statement about their belief in God and what they believe to be true about God; and that what they pray for is a

statement about themselves and those things that they view as valuable and important in their lives and in the wider world.

REFLECTION:

Disciples of Jesus are pray-ers. They talk to God, and, like Jesus, they enjoy and even long for the opportunity to do so. As you look at your life and think about your prayer habits, how regular and frequent are your conversations with God? Do you have a regular time for prayer? A regular place where you pray?

If your prayers are infrequent, often occurring only when you find yourself in trouble or in search of answers, what does that say about your view of God?

Do you believe that God is loving, and that God knows you and wants to be known by you? If so, what in your prayer-life needs to change for prayer-life to reflect that view of God? What is one step that you can take in that direction beginning today and continuing throughout the next week?

February 25: Read Luke 12

Having spoken with his disciples, in Luke 11, about the importance of persisting in prayer, Jesus now turns his attention to the fact that his disciples need to be persistent in their witness, even in the face of great hardships and persecution.

I think it is safe to say that following Jesus, while rewarding, is not always easy. Thankfully, the cost of discipleship is not listed in fine print at the end of the contract. Jesus did not try to hide or disguise the cost for his first followers and, neither, does he try to do so with us.

It will be difficult, he tells them.

They will be brought before the synagogue leaders, and the rulers and authorities because of him. It's not a matter of *if*, but *when*, Jesus says.

Yet, despite the hardships; regardless of the challenges and difficulties, Jesus is certain that they can remain strong, serve him with boldness, and faithfully continue his work. God the Holy Spirit will be with them. The Holy Spirit will help them with what to say. The Holy Spirit will be the source of their boldness.

REFLECTION:

As we live as Jesus' disciples in the world, things will not always be easy. We will, from time to time, be misunderstood. We might be mistreated. The day may come when we face persecution. Rather than despairing, rather than wilting in the face of the challenges, we need to trust that God the Holy Spirit will be with us. It will be easier to trust the Holy Spirit and live boldness during the most difficult times, if we learn to trust the Holy Spirit with some of the smaller challenges. As you look at your life, what is one small challenge that you could ask the Holy Spirit to help you with? Boldness in sharing your faith? Courage to address a sin in your own life and seek help? Strength to have a difficult conversation with someone?

What is one way that you can, with the Holy Spirit's help, exercise boldness in that area today?

February 26: Read Luke 13

Heartbreak. Anguish. Sorrow. These words describe rather well how Jesus feels at the end of Luke's thirteenth chapter.

His relationship with the Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, and teachers of the law has been contentious.

The secular ruling authorities will have a hand to play in Jesus' suffering and death.

Many of the household of Israel, God's chosen people, will reject the Messiah, whom they have been longing for, and whose coming they have awaited for centuries.

Knowing all of this, it would have been rather easy to understand if Jesus harbored a little anger toward Jerusalem and its inhabitants. We could appreciate bitterness, if it was there, as it seems to have been warranted.

Yet, as Jesus looks over Jerusalem, it is sorrow that Jesus feels. It is tears that he sheds for this city and its people.

Jesus carries a burden for those who have and will do him wrong and cause him harm. He longs to embrace them, even though they will reject him.

That burden will lead Jesus to sacrifice everything—willingly laying his life down, dying to make possible the forgiveness of sin and the hope of everlasting life to everyone. Even to those who rejected him. Even for those who hurt him. Even to those who called for and carried out his crucifixion.

Salvation is made possible because God refuses to give up on anyone. God loves. God seeks. God is not willing to let anyone perish. So, God persists and God pursues those who have shown no interest in Him.

REFLECTION:

Whom have you given up on that God has not given up on?

As a disciple of Jesus our heart should break for the things and people that break that heart of God. If God loves and has not given up on that person, then why have you? Take some time and pray for that person, or those persons, whom you have given up on. Ask God to break your heart for them, as His heart breaks for them. Ask God to help you see that person, or those persons, as God sees them.

What is one small thing that you can do with great love to help that person, or those persons, know that God loves them and so do you?

February 27: Read Luke 14

Disciples are Kingdom people. Kingdom people understand the values of the King and kingdom, and, as such live out those values through what might be described as “kingdom etiquette.”

In Luke 14, the dinner table becomes the setting for Jesus to teach his host and the other guests about God’s values and how those values are manifested in and through kingdom etiquette.

As the guests arrived and waited for the meal to begin, they clamored about, attempting to pick a place of *honor* at the table. The guests do so because they want to appear important. They want to feel as if they matter, and they want the other guests to believe that they matter.

Jesus uses this as an opportunity to talk about the etiquette of the kingdom, which finds expression in *humility*. In God’s kingdom guests don’t go out of their way to posture and position themselves in places of honor. Instead, they reserve the places of honor for those who are deserving of such distinction. Disciples choose the lesser seat. They allow the Father to take the lead,

assigning our places at the table, rather than seeking out position or status.

As the conversation around the table continued, the subject turned in the direction of whom is invited to the table. The standard, cultural practice is to invite those whose relationships we enjoy and who will reciprocate the invitation, allowing us to benefit from their hospitality. In God’s kingdom that logic is turned on its head. Invite those who have no ability to repay you, Jesus declares. Table etiquette in God’s kingdom isn’t about repayment, it’s about *service* and *grace*—serving and treating people better than they deserve, without the hope of reciprocity or repayment.

REFLECTION:

Humility, grace, and service: The values of God’s kingdom are very different than the values of our culture and world. Which of these values do you struggle the most with?

Do you ever find yourself grumbling when you’ve helped someone, and they don’t say “thank you”? Why do we find it so difficult to give without the expectation of anything (at the very least a “thank you”) in return?

What is one thing that you can do, today, for someone just to bless them? Not because they deserve it. Not because they will thank you for it. Just because God loves them and so do you. In fact, find a way to do something anonymously—without any chance of your service being recognized, thanked, or rewarded.

February 28: Read Luke 15

Luke 15 is about lost things. A lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost brother.

Losing things is frustrating, as I'm sure you well know. A few weeks ago, I had been given a business card. It was important to me for a number of reasons. Knowing that I needed to contact the person who had given me the card, I put it in my pant's pocket and took it to work with me. Sometime between when I put the business card in my pocket and when I went to retrieve it, it went missing. Did it fall out when I took out my wallet to pay for lunch? Did it work its way out as I stood and sat, moving from meeting to meeting throughout the day? When did I lose it? Where was I when it went missing?

I attempted to answer these questions. I searched high and low. I rifled through drawers, looked under seats, and scoured through garbage cans. In the end, I was unable to find the business card.

Losing things is frustrating.

Finding lost things, however, is a joyful experience—one worthy of celebration.

When the lost sheep is found, the shepherd rejoices.

When the lost coin is restored, the owner rejoices.

When the lost and wayward child returns home, the father throws a feast.

When the sinner repents, the angels rejoice.

God's kingdom is known for its celebrations. Angels rejoicing over lost people who are found, sinners who repent coming home. In God's kingdom there is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

It is little wonder, then, that Jesus, who takes great delight in lost people repenting and coming home, spends so much time with sinners (Lk 15.2). It is little wonder that he is criticized for spending time with drunks, tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners who are so far from God. After all, he takes great joy and finds immense delight in the sinner being forgiven, the lost being found, the hopeless becoming hopeful.

REFLECTION:

As disciples of Jesus, not only should our heart break for the things that break the heart of God; we should also rejoice at those things that cause God to rejoice. We serve a God who finds great delight, and celebrates, the lost being found. When was the last time you celebrated, or had a party, because changed someone's life? For example: a broken marriage was restored; an addiction in the beginning stages of being overcome; a wayward child come home; or a strained relationship made new.

Jesus takes the initiative to seek out those whom are lost (just as the shepherd pursued the lost sheep; the widow sought out the lost coin; and the father anxiously ran out to welcome home his son). As a disciple of Jesus, what are you doing to seek out those who are lost? What are you doing to meet them where they are?

What is one thing that you might do to seek out those who are lost? For example: You could invite someone to attend church. You might also consider hosting a dinner party with friends from work and friends from church, so that they can get to know one another, making an invitation to church less threatening. Be creative.

March 1: Read Luke 16

Money is one of those subjects that can be difficult to talk about. It is a loaded topic; an emotional subject. Each of us have strong opinions about money, a person's relationship with money, and how money could and should be used.

For all these reasons, and more than a few others, I guess it should not surprise us that Jesus has a lot to say about money and possessions, and how these things impact our relationship with God (and others). In fact, it has been suggested that one out of every ten verses in the Gospels pertains to the subject (a total of 288 verses). It has also been noted that sixteen, of the thirty-eight parables that Jesus tells, are concerned with the subject.

In Luke 16 the subject is unavoidable. The chapter begins with a story, a parable, about a shrewd and incredibly dishonest manager; and the chapter concludes with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. In the middle, Jesus and the Pharisees are back at it. We're told that the issue this time is that the Pharisees, "who were lovers of money (Lk 16.14)," took issue with Jesus and ridiculed him.

In bottom line terms, Luke 16 is about money and possessions, but it isn't. It's about money and possessions insofar as these things can easily become the focus of our lives and the telos of our being. But the chapter isn't about these things in that there is a larger issue under consideration. It's an issue of love. An issue of what gets us out of bed in the morning. It's an issue of what we stay up at night dreaming about and working towards. It a matter of what our hearts are pursuing and what we are giving our life to.

Money, and the acquiring and accumulation thereof, can be that goal and aim, just as it was for the Pharisees. But, the way in which we use the money that we have at our disposal can also be a good indicator of what we value, prize, and esteem as important. In that way, our checkbook ledger, our receipts, and our bank card or credit card statements can become a tool by which we begin to see,

understand, and evaluate our priorities. After all, what we spend our money on can tell us a lot about what we value and hold dear.

REFLECTION:

What would you say is your primary motivation in life? What excites you? What do you get up in the morning and are excited to do?

If someone found your checkbook ledger, credit card statements, and/or receipts what might they think you are passion about and/or committed to?

This is a place for grace rather than condemnation, an opportunity for newness of life rather than continuing life as-is. If you were to live in such a way that not only you, but everyone you met, knew that you were committed to following Jesus and engaging in the work of God's kingdom, what would need to change? How would your life look different than it currently does? How would your priorities need to change? Make a list.

March 2: Read Luke 17

And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. (Lk 17.14b-16, NRSV).

When people encounter Jesus, they are forever changed. Just ask the ten lepers that call out to Jesus as he is traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

In their desperation they call out to Jesus from *a distance*. Distance was something they were accustomed to. After all, because of their leprosy, these men were outcasts. Deemed unclean, they were not able to have direct contact with others. Theirs was an

isolated life. A life of separation. I'm sure there were many days that they felt alone, uncared for, and possibly unwanted.

Seeing the lepers and recognizing their need, Jesus, in love and with a great deal of compassion, tells them to go and show themselves to the priest. After all, it would take a priestly pronouncement for them to be recognized as clean, thereby restoring them to community—eliminating the distance between the healed leper and those from whom these men had been estranged.

To go to the priests would have taken no small measure of faith, as there is no indication that they have as of yet been healed. In fact, Luke records that it was *as they went* that they were healed. Truly, theirs was a journey of faith.

Ten had been afflicted. Each went to the priest. All were pronounced clean. But only one returned to express his gratitude, and he was a Samaritan at that!

Jesus extolled this man's faith and lauded his gratitude.

For disciples, whose lives have been changed and transformed by the grace and love of God, faith and gratitude go together. Disciples of Jesus have an attitude of gratitude.

REFLECTION:

Pause for a moment and grab a pen and piece of paper. Take a few moments to reflect on the things of life and faith that you are thankful for. Make a list of the things that you are thankful for and express your gratitude to God for the many blessings that He has given you.

As you reflect on your list and express thanks to God, ask yourself if your life is characterized by an attitude of gratitude? If not, what needs to change? What is one step that you can take today to cultivate an attitude of gratitude?

What must take place for that attitude of gratitude to become the regular posture of your heart and life?

March 3: Read Luke 18

Look, we have left our homes and followed you (Lk 18.28b, NRSV).

Following Jesus is costly.

Peter and the Twelve knew this. They left their homes, families, and careers to accompany Jesus on his travels. Personal comfort was sacrificed to further Jesus' mission and the work of God's kingdom.

Jesus was well aware of the cost. In fact, in a short while, he will pull the Twelve aside and have a conversation with them about his impending death. He's on the way to the cross and to follow Jesus involves cross-bearing on the part of the disciple.

Jesus' commitment was unwavering. Despite knowing what was to come and the pain that he was to endure, Jesus never faltered. He was willing to endure mocking, intense pain, and even death to accomplish God the Father's plans and purposes. Nothing would get in the way. There was no turning back.

The Twelve's commitment wasn't exactly unwavering. There would be some faltering and even failure in the days to come. But, with the exception of Judas, they would regroup and press forward with passionate resolve, gladly sacrificing and enduring hardship so that the good news of Jesus Christ could be proclaimed, lives changed, and the work of God's kingdom accomplished.

It was a level of sacrifice and commitment the rich young ruler was not willing to sign on for, however. Following Jesus would require too much. It would impinge upon his life in a way, and to a degree, that he could not bear.

REFLECTION:

What have you had to sacrifice to follow Jesus?

Jesus put his finger on the area of the rich young ruler's life that would keep him from following. Do you have an area like that in your life? If so, talk to God about it, and ask for God's help to follow Him, even if it means sacrifice in that area.

March 4: Read Luke 19

As Jesus made his way toward Jerusalem, the cross was looming before him. The long-awaited, much-anticipated Messiah and Savior had come and he would be rejected by his own people—the very people he came to save. Jesus entered the city triumphantly at the start of the week, and by week's end, he would be mocked, beaten, and nailed to cross. The Messiah would be treated as a common criminal. Naked, splayed, and bleeding his tortured body would be on display for everyone to see.

Knowing what was ahead; aware of his own anguish and the heartbreaking rejection that he would experience at the hands of those whom had longed for his coming, it would be easy to understand if Jesus shed a few tears as he came near the city. Tears of sorrow over the pain that he would experience. Tears of grief over all that he was leaving behind. Tears of lament expressing how unfair it was that all this was happening. Tears that expressed that question common to humanity: *Why me?* After all, this is what we would likely do.

Luke tells us that as Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he did indeed cry. He wept over the city. Not because it was unfair that the innocent One was going to give his life for as a ransom for many. Not because he had to say goodbye.

Jesus cried tears of love. Tears of compassion.

His heart was broken for Jerusalem and her people.

Jesus wept because salvation had come and those who so desperately needed it were clueless as to what God was doing.

He wept because peace was within their grasp, but the people were missing the opportunity to experience it.

REFLECTION:

Who do you know that is in need of salvation and peace, but is clueless as to what God desires to do for them?

How often do you pray for that person? How fervent and passionate are your prayers for that person?

Take some time and talk to God. Ask God to help you to have the same level of love and compassion for that person that Jesus had for Jerusalem and its people.

March 5: Read Luke 20

“Authority” is defined as, “the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.”

Jesus healed and performed miracles with an authority that left people amazed and in awe of him.

Jesus preached, taught, and explained God’s Word in such a way that it became alive.

The religious leaders—the chief priests, scribes, and elders questioned the authority of Jesus. Where did his power come from? How was he able to heal as he did? How could he teach and proclaim God’s Word with such power?

They who should have recognized God's authority were clueless.

They who should have celebrated God's authority over illness, disease, demons, the weather, the seas, and all of the creative order did not comprehend what God the Father was doing through God the Son.

They who should have, in humility, submitted to God's authority over their own lives were too busy trying to trap Jesus to see that he should be the authority in and over their lives.

So, they fought against God.

They questioned Jesus' authority.

They did all in their power to cling to what authority that had over the people and the society in which they lived.

REFLECTION:

As a follower of Jesus, do you welcome Jesus' authority over your life? Or do you question it?

If you question it, what area(s) of your life are trying to retain authority over?

What are you afraid you will lose, or what are you afraid will change, if you submit to Jesus' authority over your life?

Take some time to talk to God. As you pray, talk to God about the challenges that you face, as you seek to submit to His authority. Then, slowly and intentionally, submit to God's authority over each and every area of your life.

March 6: Read Luke 21

Following Jesus isn't for the faint of heart.

As Jesus draws closer to the cross, he spends a great deal of time talking with the Twelve about what they can expect as they follow him. In Luke 21.12-19, Jesus takes some time to brief the disciples about what they can expect as they follow him. They will be arrested and persecuted; imprisoned for their faith; and betrayed by friends and family. They will be hated because of Christ. Some, Jesus said, would even forfeit their lives.

Not surprisingly, the crowds would become fewer and smaller, the closer Jesus got to the cross. The number who would follow Jesus, sticking with him until the very end, would become fewer and fewer.

Following Jesus and bearing one's cross is not easy and it is not for the faint of heart. But, for those who prevail; for those who endure, it is worth it. Perseverance, in the face of persecution, will open the door for them to testify and serve as witnesses, to the powers and authorities that attempt to thwart the work of God's kingdom. The persecution that the kingdoms of the world would intend to snuff out the work of Christ, would become the very means by which the good news would spread---as the persecuted and scattered church proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ wherever they landed. And, they, personally, will gain life—eternal life, with Christ, in His kingdom.

REFLECTION:

God has a way of redeeming and utilizing the hardships that we face for His honor and glory. What are some hardships and challenges that you have faced?

In what ways, if any, has God used them to His glory?

In what ways might God use them for His future glory?

March 7: Read Luke 22

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him... Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed... In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground (Lk 22.39, 41, 44, NRSV).

As we read Luke 6, we spent some time looking at Jesus' prayer time prior to selecting his followers, at the *beginning* of his ministry. Now, nearing the *end* of his ministry, a short while before his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, we again find Jesus going out on the mountainside to pray. Luke tells us that this *was [Jesus'] custom*.

The close relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit that we noted on that day is just as strong and just as vital now, as it had ever been. Facing one of the most challenging, but also one of the most important parts of his ministry, Jesus withdraws—a stone's throw from his disciples—to be alone with the Father.

Even more noteworthy is what Luke records about the time that follows. Remember how we said early on that Luke's account of Jesus' life and ministry stresses that Jesus is wholly God and wholly human—in a moment of anguish, surround his impending death, Jesus' prayers become more fervent. He prays and pours his heart out to the father. He prayed with such ferocity and intensity that his sweat became as blood, as it fell to the ground.

There are times when God and I have had some serious and lengthy conversations. There have been nights where I have not

slept, because I am so intently seeking the heart of God. There have been seasons where I have withdrawn from the busyness and regular rhythms of life so that I could seek God's face and God's direction. But, I have never reached the point of praying with such earnestness that my sweat has become as blood.

Have you?

REFLECTION:

Jesus' conversation with God the Father is intense. Jesus is fervently seeking the Father's wisdom and will. If he, very God of very God, sought the Father's wisdom and direction so intensely, what does that say about how we, as Jesus' followers, should come before God in prayer?

If you were to honestly assess your prayer life, do you seek God with the kind of intensity and earnestness that Jesus does?

What would have to change for you to seek God with such earnestness? When you pray? Where you pray? The subject of your prayers?

March 8: Read Luke 23

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (Lk 23.34, NRSV)."

Throughout this Lenten season, and our reading of Luke's Gospel, we've noted Jesus' love and compassion. Now, as he hangs upon the cross, bearing the sins of the world, and dying for those who have rejected him—Jesus' love and compassion is undeniably clear.

Instead of cursing those whom have hurt him, Jesus cries out to the Father and asks that they be forgiven.

Instead of calling down an angelic host to obliterate those who have nailed him to the cross, in love, Jesus begs the Father to forgive those whose hands drove the nails.

Instead of sending lightning bolts to zap the masses who had cheered, “Crucify him, crucify him,” Jesus, in compassion, asks the Father to wipe away and forget the wrongs that they had done.

Love. Compassion. Grace. Mercy. Forgiveness. We love these attributes of Jesus. We laud these aspects of his ministry.

As followers of Jesus, as disciples who have studied under the Master, these things should define us as well.

REFLECTION:

Who are you struggling to forgive?

Why is forgiving that person, or those persons, so difficult?

Take some time and talk to God. Ask God to help you deal with any unforgiveness that you are experiencing. Ask God to help you forgive that person, or those persons who have hurt and wronged you, just as God has forgiven you.

March 9: Read Luke 24

The Resurrection changes everything.

On Good Friday, very God of very God died.

For all intents and purposes, hope was lost. Hope died that day along with Jesus. Earthly hopes. Eternal hopes. All seemed lost.

The sadness, heartbreak, and hopelessness of Good Friday was followed by the *silence* of Holy Saturday. And the silence was deafening. Where there had been miracles, there was silence. Where

there had been instruction about life in God's kingdom, there was silence. Where there were once shouts of joy as the lame had walked, there was silence. Where there were once cries of jubilation as the blind were made to see, there was silence. Where there was the forgiveness of sins and the proclamation of wholeness, there was now silence.

As humans, we're not good with the silences of life. Silence is uncomfortable.

So, on Resurrection Day, two friends are traveling the road to Emmaus. They are filling the silence, talking about everything that has taken place. As they're walking and talking they are joined by a companion, whom they do not recognize. We know their companion to be Jesus, but they do not recognize him as such. They share with him all that has taken place. They share that as he died, so did their hopes and dreams. They even shared their consternation and confusion at the supposed Resurrection. After all, some of their group had returned to the tomb, but, unlike the women, they had not seen Jesus. Instead, they experienced silence.

It is into that profound, deep, troubling, uncomfortable silence that Jesus steps. It is into that silence that he comes, sharing a table, enjoying fellowship, and restoring hope.

In an instant their eyes were open. The silence lifted. He is Risen!

REFLECTION:

Silence. It comes in many forms. Sometimes it comes in the form of what appear to be unanswered prayers. In other instances, silence is that awkward pause—where we don't know what to

say, or what to ask for. In still other instance, silence is what happens as we wait, as we long for direction. As you look at your life, do you find yourself in a time of silence?

If so, how are you feeling? Anxious? Worried? Defeated? Alone?

If you find yourself in a season of silence, take heart. You are not alone. God is there. He is with you. He will not leave or forsake you. It could be that like the two men on the Emmaus Road, you are not recognizing his voice. It could be that your eyes aren't yet keen to what he is doing. That said, take some time and talk to God. Share your feelings with Him. Ask God to open your eyes to what He is doing. Ask God to help you hear and recognize His voice.