

“Journey into Discipleship”
Sermons by Dr. L.D. Thomas
adapted for the
Adult Curriculum
First United Methodist Church
Tulsa, OK

Edited by Bob Pennison
and Dr. Arden Autry
for 2020

Introduction

Some who have been at First United Methodist Church, Tulsa, for a long time remember when our pastor, Dr. L. D. Thomas, preached a series of sermons called "Journey into Discipleship." The series took about eighteen months to complete (1979-81), although Dr. Thomas took breaks from the series for special occasions. The series was based on the Gospel of Luke, in which Jesus' journey to Jerusalem occupies a significant portion.

Those who have been at our church since 2011 can remember that we spent a year going through those sermons in our adult Sunday School classes. This present curriculum is only eight sermons from that much longer series.

Bob Pennison and his wife, Teri, have been faith-promise missionaries from our church for many years. Bob has worked through Dr. Thomas's sermons with great care and has translated them for churches and believers in Spain. From his deep acquaintance with the material, Bob has selected eight sermons that we believe get to the heart of what it means to be a disciple traveling the road with Jesus.

Dr. Arden Autry has provided additional editorial touches for the sake of teachers reading the lessons, but the content is from Dr. Thomas. Any significant additions have been placed inside brackets and identified with AA.

Questions found at the beginning of a lesson are usually the questions used by Dr. Thomas for review at the end of his message. These questions might be useful to begin the lesson, if a teacher wants to start with a question or discussion.

The Revised Standard Version is the Bible generally quoted by Dr. Thomas. That version was the pew Bible at the time.

LESSON #1 of 8 - GOD'S RHYTHM FOR YOUR LIFE

[What is God's rhythm for our lives?]

[What two things can keep us from following God's rhythm?]

[How can we avoid missing God's rhythm in our own lives?]

LUKE 10:38-42 tells us that, "As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, (to Jerusalem) He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me.'

'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'"

Lloyd Douglas, who wrote the novel, *The Robe*, had a friend who had a small studio where he gave violin lessons; the studio was in an area with other music studios nearby. One day, he asked his friend how things were going, and the friend took a small hammer, struck a tuning fork, and said, "that is my good news for today. The note I struck was an "A" and that's something I can depend on."

He continued, "The other studios may be off key from time to time, but my tuning fork is always going to sound an "A." That's something I can always depend on, and that's my good news for today."

In a way, that's what Jesus is saying to Martha, isn't it? Martha is busy fixing a meal, while her sister, Mary, sits at Jesus' feet, learning from Him. Martha wants Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help her with the meal, but Jesus told Martha that Mary had taken the high road of discipleship, in that she was, in fact, investing herself in things more lasting than cooking.

Jesus was saying to Martha, "Martha, you're troubled, not because of this one small disagreement with Mary over the housework, but because you are out of tune with life itself. The good news is that there's something you can depend on to get your life IN tune with God's rhythm; and that's what your sister is doing."

Although the family squabble may seem like a fairly minor thing to include in the Bible, it gives us a really deep insight that deals with sin and God's answer for sin.

Jesus wants us to know that sin isn't just an occasional sour note in the rhythm of life; in fact, sin distorts EVERY note we play in life because it puts us **out** of tune, both with God and with His plan.

We mentioned a violin just a moment ago. A violin has lots of parts, and each one is important. If any of the parts **DOESN'T** do its job, the violin can't play the way it was made to play.

Well, that's what sin does to us; it keeps us from being in tune with the God who created us.

The good news is that God sent His Son, Jesus, to be the tuning fork in OUR lives. That's why Jesus told Martha, "Mary

has chosen what is better, and that won't be taken away from her.”

Mary chose to get her life in tune with God, – that's good for anyone to know who wants to be Jesus' disciple. She was motivated by love - not duty. Doing it any **other** way is trying to do **God's** thing in OUR OWN way. If we don't make Jesus the center, we're always going to be out of tune with God, no matter how hard **we** try to do what we think is right.

And so, Jesus tells his followers, (and that includes US, by the way) to be tuned to HIS rhythm of life. And **here** is how we do it:

First, we have to RECEIVE His love; and then, once we're on board with Him, we need to SHARE His love with the people around us.

Martha was trying to give, but she hadn't yet received from Jesus, and so she got it BACKWARDS. And in this story, Jesus is telling **us** that **we** need to be on guard against **two** dangerous things – things that people have known about for a long, long time.

The first thing we need to be aware of, is this tendency that **many** churches have – and that is, the tendency to minister mostly to themselves. That's what the priest and the Levite, in the story of the Good Samaritan, were doing. They were more concerned about their own reputation in the community than the injured man in the road.

And when Jesus showed up on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and Moses, His disciples were

focused on themselves when they told Jesus that it would a good idea to build a tabernacle right there on the mountain, so that then they wouldn't have to go back to all the problems, back down there in the valley. But Jesus led them back down to that same valley, and it was there that He healed an epileptic boy, a boy that His disciples hadn't been able to heal. Jesus was showing them that reaching out to others was their **first** priority – and He wants **us** to know that it's OUR priority, too.

God has always had someone who would keep His church from turning in on itself. Look at Paul for example. While the elders sat in Jerusalem, probably discussing their building program, and the church by-laws, Paul was out in the **real** world, bringing Jesus' love to people whose **real** sickness was sin. And, because Paul got it right, the church spread hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, reaching all the way to the Roman Emperor.

Unfortunately, Paul's example didn't last. As the church grew, it began to turn in on **itself**. To outsiders, it **looked** healthy – it was growing, and it may have even had other campuses here and there. But **inwardly** it was using its strength to keep ITSELF alive. No wonder we call the next thousand years the **dark** ages.

Then, much later, by the 16th century, God called a man named Martin Luther to heal a sick church. Luther reminded the church that their job wasn't just rituals by priests; it had to do with the priesthood of ALL believers, and it's THEIR job to bring God's healing love, in Christ, to a world that's dying from sin.

But then again, for the following two hundred years, the church gradually grew fat and soft. So, God called another man

by the name of John Wesley, and others, to bring the church back to its moorings.

Well, that brings us right up to OUR day. The latest news, coming from around the world, is that the church has gradually gotten sick. WE now suffer from “Martha’s Disease.” We call it Humanism, or “Do-good-ism.” It’s easy to recognize by its **Busyness**. We come up with plans, make announcements, organize task forces, and get busy doing lots of things.

But we can also begin to care more about being busy and less about the **real** enemy – which is SIN – and **that’s** what keeps us from being in tune with God, and HIS plan.

The danger in Humanism of course, is that it tries to get us to believe that **we** can do God’s work in **OUR** way. Like Martha, we can get busy doing good things, but they aren’t necessarily **JESUS’** thing. We go out into the world to do **our own** job, in **our own** power, instead of taking **Christ’s** love to our world. Humanism is pretty easy to identify: it’s more about us, and less about Jesus.

Many people today see the Bible as a **man-made** book, instead of seeing that it is the all-powerful Word of **God**, sharper than a two-edged sword.

They also see Jesus as a human example of what WE should try to be, in OUR OWN effort, instead of seeing Him as the great **Redeemer from sin** and the real **Power** for life

The Holy Spirit is more and more seen today as just a theological expression, instead of being known as the One who brings us the truth, and Who enables us to live GOD’S kind of life.

Prayer today is seen by many as a cop-out, or a crutch, when, in fact, it gives us the awesome chance to sit at Jesus' feet, where we can receive His love AND His Spirit, and so that we can bring HIS miracle medicine to a sick world.

Worship today is seen by many as nothing more than a human celebration, when actually it's a chance for us to receive from God and give back to Him.

In other words, Humanism doesn't work – it tries to substitute man's work, for the supernatural power of God in Christ. Humanists only see themselves and their works, instead of seeing **Christ** as the One Who saves the world. But that approach is sort of like trying to cure cancer with a Band-Aid.

Well, the good news is that there **is** a PERFECT cure – a miracle drug – for both a church that turns in on itself, and for the disease of Humanism.

What is the remedy, you ask? It's that we're called first to RECEIVE God's love and forgiveness in Christ, and then GIVE that **same** healing love to OTHER people. It's the way God has ALWAYS worked. HIS rhythm is this: receive and give, receive and give, receive and give. **That's** what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus, "Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." In other words, "Nicodemus, you must first receive my Spirit before you can do my work."

God hasn't called us to try to patch-up a sin-sick world with a few good works now and then. Instead, **WE** must FIRST RECEIVE the Spirit, and the love of Christ for OURSELVES; then

we're able to take that Good News out to a world that's hurting and dying.

Of course, Jesus knew what was coming. He saw the sickness of "church-I'-an-ity" in His own disciples, who wanted to stay on the mountain and celebrate the Transfiguration. And He also saw the sickness of Humanism, in Nicodemus, who had a FORM of Godliness but lacked God's POWER.

And God has a message for **us** today, too. This is His message: if we want to answer the call to serve Him, we need to practice HIS Divine Rhythm. He wants us to know that HE'S our tuning fork – and He **never** changes. So, the rhythm He wants us to have is this: First, receive Christ. Second, Give Him away. Then, receive again, and give again. Receive, give; receive, give; receive, give. That's HIS way, and He wants it to be OUR way, too.

1. So then: What is God's RHYTHM for our lives?

(Receive, give, receive, give, receive, give, etc.)

2. What two things can keep us from following God's rhythm? (If our church is a church that is turned in on itself; and, if we think that we can do things OUR way, instead of GOD'S way.)

3. How can we avoid missing God's rhythm in our own lives? (By first receiving from God, and then giving to others - it's a process of receiving, and giving, receiving and giving).

Let's pray.

LESSON #2 of 8 - LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

[In this lesson, look for five things that will help us to receive from God in prayer.]

Let's join Jesus and His disciples as they walk from Galilee to Jerusalem for the last time, before Jesus gives up His life.

And as they walked, Jesus needed to spend some time with His Father, and so he stopped to pray.

His disciples had seen Him do that lots of times, but they were never really in on what He said when He prayed. This time, one of his disciples asked Him to teach **them** how to pray.

Of course, He wanted to help them; so He gave them some prayer guidelines. Over the centuries, the prayer He gave them is what we call, "The Lord's Prayer," a prayer that most of us know by memory. [AA: Luke's account of this is in Luke 11:1-4. The form we are most familiar with from repetition is from Matthew 6:9-13.]

This morning we're going to break this prayer down into five basic parts. These five parts not only tell us that **prayer** is the way for us to receive from God; the five parts of Jesus' prayer also tell us **how** to do that.

We're going to go quickly over these five ways, but we'll see how helpful they can be in guiding **us** through **our** prayer time.

1st of all, Jesus said we need to know **Who** we're praying to. People all over the world believe in some kind of god (with a small "g"), but they are praying to the wrong gods.

Jesus taught us how to pray to the **right** God, the true God. We call Him our Father, and we say that He's Holy. What that means is that He's Super Special, as gods go, and that He's the **only** One who's like that. In fact, He's so special that not only is He holy, even his **name** is holy.

So, Jesus started His prayer by saying, "Father, Your name is holy." It means that God and His name are unique – no one else in all the universe is equal to Him. In fact, way back in Deuteronomy, whenever God's people confessed their belief in God, they said, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD **our** God is **one** LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4). [AA: This is called the "Shema" and is the basic confession of God in Judaism to this day.]

God is not just the god of the water, or the sun and moon, but He's the God of all these things, and of everything else, too. If it weren't for Him, there wouldn't be any God to worship – and there wouldn't be any worshippers, either, including us.

About 500 years ago, Copernicus discovered that the whole universe is one unit, and that the earth, as only a part of this solar system, rotates around the sun. In much the same way, God came along and said that everything had, and has, its beginning in Him – He's the center around which everything else rotates.

So when we say, "Father, you are holy and your name is holy," we're opening our lives up to the only source of life and power, God the Creator. We're recognizing that this God is the

only source of true love and mercy. So, we begin our prayer by acknowledging God Almighty as our source – our **only** source.

2nd. Jesus said that since God the Father is holy and unique, we need to be a part of His kingdom, and we do that by becoming citizens in His kingdom.

Jesus said, “When you pray, say, ‘God, **Your** kingdom come.’” That simply means that we know He’s in charge, and that **we** want to be a **part** of His kingdom. We want to stop rebelling against Him, and submit to Him. After all, why would we pray that His kingdom come, and then decide not to be a part of it? That wouldn’t make any sense at all.

If we want to be in tune with Him, we must first be willing to be a part of His kingdom, and we do that by giving ourselves – our time and talents, and our possessions – even ourselves – to Him and to His kingdom.

So, why would we pray that His kingdom come to earth, and then not do anything to support it? This means that we not only **say** we want to be a part of His kingdom, but we also give our lives to His kingdom. We pray with our lips **and** our lives.

3rd. Jesus then said, “Give us **each day** our daily bread.” He’s talking about today – not yesterday, and not tomorrow, but today. It’s not looking backward or forward – it’s looking at the only day we actually have – TODAY!

When the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they had to learn to depend on God, one day at a time. They could remember when, back in Egypt, they had plenty of everything, and now, in the wilderness, they complained to Moses that all they had to eat was manna and quail – day in

and day out. They may have even worried that they might starve to death. [Exod. 16]

Moses told them, “God can only help you if you trust Him, and you have to do that one day at a time. But if you continually keep thinking about the past, you miss out on the very things you need the most - that is, God’s blessing in the **present**.”

But of course, they didn’t listen, so God had to teach them to depend on Him **every day**. He promised them bread in the morning and quail in the evening, but they had to trust Him enough to gather only enough bread and quail to meet the current day’s needs, with a double portion before the weekend.

Those who didn’t trust God to keep his word ended up with rotten bread, and meat that wasn’t fit to eat. They thought that their security was in the manna, not in God.

And now, Jesus is saying the same thing to us, too. He wants us, in prayer, to gather our blessings fresh every morning. Prayer isn’t looking back, and it’s not looking forward. It’s experiencing God’s presence **right now**. It’s making His presence a **daily** way of life.

4th. Then Jesus, still speaking in the present, says, “When you pray – say: ‘Forgive us our sins as we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.’” He’s saying that we have to both **ask for forgiveness** for ourselves, and **give forgiveness** to others, and we need to do this every day. If we haven’t been forgiven, our relationship with God is broken. And if we haven’t forgiven others, our relationship with them is broken, too.

Prayer is basically relating to God, and then giving ourselves to relating to others. Jesus goes so far as to say that if we come to the altar to pray, but still have unforgiveness between ourselves and others, or between us and God, we're basically wasting our time, unless we first make things right by forgiving.

Unforgiveness is bondage – bondage to our own sin, and to other people's sins. But God has given us a way to be free from all that – it's by **receiving** from God and then **giving** to others – and what we receive and give is forgiveness.

We need to accept the forgiveness God offers us through the death of Jesus on the cross. We need to accept it fresh every morning. If we don't do that, then **our** love will spoil, just like the manna in the wilderness – it will be useless. The Bible says that Christ wants to pour His forgiving love into our hearts, so that we can both be forgiven and forgiving.

The only way we can really live a life of forgiveness, is if we first accept God's forgiveness through Jesus; that creates an atmosphere of forgiveness, and an atmosphere for miracles.

5th. Jesus ended His prayer (in Luke 11:4) when He said, "Lead us not into temptation."

God never planned that we should live our lives in our own strength. When Jesus called His disciples, He didn't leave them to shift for themselves. In fact, He promised them supernatural strength. He said in plain, easy-to-understand words that He would never leave us alone – that He would always be with us.

But our temptation is to go it alone. We try to be good parents, good workers, even good Christians – but Jesus says – through Paul – that, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way of escape, so that you can overcome it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

To be born again and filled with the Spirit is to be led by God, instead of being led by our humanness. So, when we pray, we can't let our human thoughts and feelings guide us. Prayer gives us the chance to let Christ and **His** Spirit be in control.

Many of us don't have a good prayer life because we let the world around us dictate how we think and act. We follow the world's way of doing things, instead of Christ's way. He wants us make prayer **our** way of life. If we do that, HIS prayer will become a pattern, not just for praying but for living.

Questions:

What five things will help us to receive from God in prayer?

(Know WHO we're praying to;

Citizenship in His kingdom;

Live in the present;

Forgiveness;

Be led by Christ)

Let's Pray

LESSON #3 of 8 – A BIG STUMBLING BLOCK

[What is this big stumbling block for a Christian?]

[How does God want to fill our emptiness?]

Luke 11:24-26

When the unclean spirit has gone out of man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, “I will return to my house from which I came.” And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.

Galatians 3:3

Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?

Jesus always packs so much truth into just a few words. In our Scripture — only three sentences, Luke 11:24, 25, and 26— Jesus not only tells us the worst thing that can happen to us as disciples, but He also tells us how to prevent it from happening.

We already know that Jesus has warned us that when we become disciples we have to be ready for our enemy, Satan, and we do that by knowing his evil ways, and defending ourselves by having a firm faith in Christ. Now, in Luke 11:24-26 Jesus says this:

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, “I will return to my house from which I came.” And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.

I. The Empty House

The first danger Jesus wants us to see is the danger of being empty. Why is this so? A house isn't built to stand empty. It's built to be a home – a place where people live and enjoy life.

And Jesus wants us to see that, as His followers, we need to be full of His presence, not empty. The life He created for us was meant to be full, not empty. Emptiness goes against everything that life stands for. Emptiness invites all those ugly things to creep in and crawl into our lives and take over. Jesus wants something far better than that for all of His followers.

II. The Spirit-Filled House

So, Jesus doesn't stop there. He also wants us to see the dream house of life that He's come to build in us. He wants us to see that, as His disciples, we're meant to live as disciples by being full, not empty. He is to be our righteousness, our goodness; He is to be our truth, our wisdom; He wants to be our power, and our strength. And He gives us this full kind of life by filling us with His Holy Spirit. We can accept that kind of life – the gift of His Holy Spirit — only if we have faith in Him. If we shut the door and don't let Christ fill our house with His Holy Spirit, we are giving an open invitation to seven worse devils to enter and live there!

Who or what are the seven worse devils Jesus is talking about? In the first place, we know that in the Bible the number seven has a very special meaning. It means perfection or without limit. For example, Jesus says we are to forgive those who sin against us “seventy times seven” [Matt. 18:22; or “seven times seventy” in some versions]. Jesus means that forgiveness is unlimited. So, seven worse devils simply means an unlimited number of them. It means they just keep on coming. In Galatians 5, Paul lists some of these “seven” worse devils for us, but after his list grows to fifteen, he adds “and the like” (or, “things like these,” Gal. 5:21).

The important thing is not knowing what all of these ugly things are, but knowing how to avoid the emptiness that invites them in. Fortunately, Paul talks about this in the New Testament, over and over. In Galatians 3:3, read in its context, Paul talks specifically about **two** stumbling blocks that will make us empty. *Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?*

III. The Big Stumbling Block — Legalism

We can see this Stumbling Block by looking at the Jews who rejected Jesus, because they stumbled at the **LAW**. Another stumbling block can be seen by looking at the Greeks; Paul calls their stumbling block, **KNOWLEDGE**. *(But we'll take a closer look at that another time.)*

The Jews insisted on substituting the Law for faith, while the Greeks insisted on substituting knowledge for faith; and so the door of their lives was closed for both groups. [See 1 Cor. 1:22-24.] Both groups were left empty, and all those ugly things that they didn't actually want in their lives overcame them. So, the stumbling block we'll look at first is **LEGALISM**.

What is *legalism*? Legalism is simply substituting religious rules for the Spirit of Christ. Legalism is trying to drive out all of those unwanted things in our lives through living by rules instead of living by grace. Legalism emphasizes what man must **not** do, instead of what God **will** do. Legalism shows the weakness of man instead of the power of God in Christ. **Why does legalism make us empty?** Because **it closes the door of faith** by putting our trust in ourselves. Why does legalism invite in seven worse devils? Because it closes the door to faith and opens the door to self-righteousness, to a critical spirit, to judgmentalism, and to pride.

So, this stumbling block for every new Christian is legalism. Unfortunately, many potential disciples never make it past this stumbling block. Instead, they spend the rest of their lives trying to formulate rules, in place of God's grace in Jesus. Many new Christians trip over this stone, by trying to lay down the law as to how others must live, and by substituting religious rules for the Spirit of Christ. Seven worse devils can rush into that emptiness, devils like pride, a critical spirit, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, and resentment.

This is what Nicodemus the Pharisee wanted to do, too. But Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you must be born again. You must be filled with my Spirit, which you can no more direct by your manmade rules, than you can by trying to control the wind!" [See John 3:1-8.] Paul says the same thing to the Galatians at the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, when he says:

For I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God . . . (Gal 2:19-20).

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? . . . Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of law, or by . . . faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? (Gal. 3:1-4).

That's the question! Have you stumbled over the stumbling block of legalism? That's the question every follower of Jesus has to answer. In fact, we all need to ask ourselves that question, today. "Am I stumbling over the stumbling block of legalism? Do I substitute legalism for the Spirit of Christ in my life? Do I try to make Christianity into a religion of rules instead of a dynamic way of life? Have I tried to form my life into my own rules? Do I think others should follow my rules, or they're not Christians? Am

I a legalist instead of a Spirit-filled disciple of my Lord? Have I just emptied my house of life and left it empty?”

That’s a big stumbling block for Believers to overcome. Many Jews in Paul’s time never got past it. Many church members today never get past it either. But if we really want to be disciples of Jesus, we have to avoid this stumbling block of legalism. So, how do we do that?

IV. Prescription for Legalism

Jesus gave us HIS prescription for legalism. If Jesus is telling us that the worst thing that can happen to us is to be empty, then the worst way to try to get rid of these unwanted things is by having a religion of rules, rules, and more rules. But that only leaves **more** emptiness, and the last shape is worse than the first, as seven **worse** devils rush in.

But what Jesus really wants us to see is the opposite of that empty house. He wants us to see our own dream house filled, with all those things that make life exciting and beautiful—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

He wants us to see every room of our dream house filled with His Holy Spirit. And this can happen in only one-way: by opening the door of faith into **every room** in our house of life, and inviting HIM to come in and be Lord. Jesus didn’t tell this story (in Luke 11) just to let us know that the worst thing that can happen to us is being empty. No, He told it to let us know that the best thing that can happen to us is to fill our house of the life of His Holy Spirit. He told it so we could fill every room so full of His Holy Spirit that there is no place for those ugly things.

That’s the only way you can transform a “*don’t* religion” into a “*do* way of life”!

It can only happen **by a specific act of your will** as you honestly take inventory of every room in your house of life. You **know** what those rooms are: your work, your relationships, marriage, family, church, social life — and all the others. Jesus is showing us that the way to live in our dream house is to give His Holy Spirit complete control over **every** room in that house.

And that's what faith is. It opens the door of each room in your house of life and invites Christ to come in and take charge. It means letting the **Spirit** of Christ rule, instead of law. That's exactly what Paul meant when he wrote to the Galatians:

For I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20).

The good news is that Jesus came to earth to show us what a dream house of life is really like. Then He sent His Holy Spirit to us, so we **can live** our lives in this dream house. Right now Jesus is standing at the door of each room in **your** own dream house knocking — knocking, knocking. The next move is up to you! Will you open the door of faith again, and let Him come in?

So, what is this big stumbling block?

Legalism = substituting religious rules for the Spirit of Christ.
(Having a house that is empty, instead of filled with Jesus)

And, how does God want to fill our emptiness?

With love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Let's Pray.

LESSON #4 of 8 - KNOW YOUR ENEMY

[Who is your/our greatest enemy?]

[How can we protect ourselves against the enemy?]

Luke 11:17-20

Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. . . . But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

One of the main themes in the Bible is conflict, starting at the very beginning, with the book of Genesis. God has just created the earth and man, and almost immediately conflict rears its ugly head. God and Satan both showed their hand - On the one hand, God gives His plan for man, and at the same time, Satan shows his evil plan to put stumbling blocks in the way of God's plan. And this conflict goes on all the way through the Bible, all the way to Revelation.

The Bible shows Satan falling from heaven, and it shows God sending Jesus to gain victory over Satan. And so, if we choose to be on God's side in this battle, we also need to know who our enemy is, and what **we** need to do to **win** the battle.

Luke 11 tells about Jesus casting a demon out of a man who couldn't speak. Then Jesus was accused of casting out the demon by Satan's power, not God's. But Jesus wants us to know that if we're going to be on His side in this battle, we need also to be against the powers of evil.

Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 11:17-18, 20-23:

Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils. He who is not with me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.

Some of us have been in the military, and we were trained to know as much as possible about the enemy, just like knowing that we should have the best weapons, and knowing how to use our weapons. Those are two important things we need to know – **who the enemy** is, and **how to be well-armed** to fight. And that’s what Jesus is saying here: As soldiers in God’s army, we need to be ready for spiritual battle; we need to know the enemy and be well-armed.

During World War II in Europe, when our troops landed on the beaches of Normandy, they knew where the enemy was and how well he was armed. That knowledge helped our troops to win. That’s what Jesus says about us - **we** need to know who **our** spiritual enemy is. Where can we find this out? Well, it’s in the Bible that we find a very clear picture of Satan.

First of all, the Bible tells us that Satan comes from heaven; he’s a fallen angel, and that means that he’s a spirit being, along with all the fallen angels. [See Rev. 12:7-9.] And as a spirit, he’s all around us, and we’re always vulnerable to his attacks.

Of course, he's known by several different names: he's called Satan, the Devil, the Tempter, and the Evil one. But no matter what you call him, he always works in pretty much the same way. That is, he tries to get us to sin, because (according to 1John 3:8) **he is** a sinner. John says, "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. And that's why Jesus came to earth - to destroy the devil's work."

The devil is called the Tempter because he tempts us by promising earthy pleasures, or power, or knowledge like God has—if we'll just disobey God. But his promises are lies because the truth isn't in him. John 8:44 says that "when the devil lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar, and the father of lies."

The Bible says Satan is the ruler of an army of fallen angels, or demons, and his army is the enemy of the human race. In fact, his power in this world is so great he is also called the ruler of this world. (See John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:7-9.). The Bible also tells us he can disguise himself as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), even though he is actually the Prince of Darkness. His area of dominion is on the earth, and he's also called "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).

Paul tells us, in Ephesians 6:11-12, that we need to "Put on the ***FULL*** armor of God so that we can stand against the devil's schemes, because our struggle isn't against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Notice that Paul tells us at least **four** things about our enemy – things we need to know in order to defeat him:

1. First, Paul says our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, a highly organized, evil Satanic spiritual kingdom, working as an evil spiritual army, with orders to destroy individuals and groups, like marriages, homes, churches, cities, and nations.
2. Second, Paul tells us we're fighting against powers – evil spiritual powers. That means Satan **can** destroy us and other things. We're fighting a powerful enemy. We need to know that, for his power can even destroy **us**.
3. Third, we're fighting against the world rulers of this present darkness. They've already made slaves out of billions of people, and the world we live in today is living in spiritual darkness. That means it's been cut off from God's light. John 8:12 tells us Jesus **is** the light of the world. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work," and to replace darkness with light (1 John 3:8).
4. Fourth, Paul says we fight against spiritual hosts of evil in the heavenly realms. We're fighting against evil spirits all around us, who will stop at nothing to win. They play by the rules of lies and deception. Satan's army is wicked, and wickedness is its plan of attack.

So, the Bible draws us a picture of our enemy. He's evil, highly organized, and he has the power to take and control the whole world, immersing it in total darkness, wickedness, and evil. Because he personifies wickedness and evil, he will stop

at nothing to destroy us, our homes, our church, our city, and our country.

So, what do you think? We know things are in a mess today, partly because—with our education and scientific discoveries—many believers have become too sophisticated to still believe in a personal devil. And although that contradicts the Bible, many today have refused to accept that there is an evil spiritual power all around us, although that **is** the battle theme that runs through the whole Bible.

Both Jesus and Paul tell us that, as soldiers of the cross, we need to wake up! Why? Because our war is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in heavenly realms.

But God doesn't stop there. He wants us to know our enemy, but He also wants us to know how to arm ourselves against that enemy.

Remember that when Jesus cast a demon out of a man, Jesus was accused of being on the Devil's side instead of on God's side. This is how Jesus answered his accusers:

Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (Luke 11:17-18, 20, NIV)

Jesus freely admits that Satan is a powerful enemy, fully armed against God and His people, and that anyone who is against Jesus is fighting on the side of the enemy and thus

helping the enemy to work out his plan of wickedness and destruction.

The really important question is this: How can we arm ourselves against the enemy and join Jesus' army? Jesus says there's only one way to do this—We need to have a rock-firm faith in Jesus, because He's the One Who leads us to victory.

The Bible says we have to arm ourselves with faith in Jesus as God's Son, who is clearly more powerful than Satan, and who has, in fact, already overcome Satan. Jesus has already faced Satan, with all his power, deceit, lies, wickedness, and evil, and Jesus has defeated him. Praise God!!

Remember that John says, "The reason the Son of God came into the world was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

The Bible wants us to know that the only power on this earth more powerful than the evil power of Satan is the holy, righteous, saving power of God in Jesus. Jesus came to earth so that you and I can have this power He's talking about, so we can be saved from Satan and his evil ways, and become a part of God's kingdom – a kingdom of love and right relationships, both for right now, and for all eternity. All of that is possible only when we have faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

So, what does all this mean? The good news is that Paul, in Ephesians 6:13-18, has already told us how to win. We win by putting on the whole armor of God, so that we can withstand Satan, in the evil day – and having done all, to stand.

Paul then tells us what this armor is like. This morning, we'll change the order slightly, and begin at our head and work our way down to our feet.

Remember that God Himself is the One Who has given us this armor. And if we want to win the battle, we have to put on the armor every day, and we have to wear all of it. We can't leave off any part of God's armor, and we can't miss a single day, or there will be a crack in the armor, and Satan will attack us at our weakest point.

So, let's review this special armor God has given us:

1. First, we need **the helmet of salvation**. We have to accept the fact that Jesus has already won the battle **for** us, and that by faith, we are no longer living under the ruler of darkness. As followers of Jesus, we now live not in darkness but in the light. As God's children, we are destined for eternal life. That's the helmet of salvation that we must put on every day.
2. Next, we must put on **the breastplate of righteousness** by accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit, and demonstrating it by being like God's Spirit.
3. Then, we must put on **the belt of truth**, by accepting God's Word as **our** truth. That needs to be the truth we live by every day, as God sets us free from the lies and deceit of Satan.
4. Next, we have to take up **the shield of faith**, by putting our trust in Jesus as our strong protector against the tricks of the devil. We must let Jesus cover us with His

blood, just as Roman soldiers were covered from head to toe by their shields.

5. Then, we need to take up **the sword of the Spirit**, which is the Word of God, by allowing the Spirit to be our Divine Interpreter of Scripture. By joining together, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, we have a two-edged sword, sharpened perfectly, so that we can win this battle. It's the weapon that Jesus has already used to defeat the enemy, and the only weapon that will defeat him for us today.
6. Finally, we must put on our feet, **the Gospel of peace**, so that we can step out into our world each day unafraid, with God's strong promise of victory, both for today, and for eternity. That means we're able to walk in peace every day, with Jesus at our side.
7. [AA: It's not listed as part of the "armor," but "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph. 6:18, ESV) is vital for those in spiritual battle for their souls or the souls of others. Communication with "the commander" is crucial for the soldier's welfare and effectiveness in the fight. Lesson 8 will focus on prayer.]

Yes, we are in a life and death struggle against a wicked, evil, deceitful enemy. But the good news is that we have an all-powerful Lord, who has already won the victory for us!!!

First John 4:4b assures us that "The One Who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world." Praise be to God!!

Let's Pray.

LESSON #5 of 8 - "THE EXCHANGE RATE THAT MATTERS"

[Does Jesus regard wealth as a problem or as an opportunity?]

[What was John Wesley's succinct advice concerning money?]

Luke 16:9 "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." (New International Version)

Luke 16:9 "I tell you, use the riches of this world to help others. In that way, you will make friends for yourselves. Then when your riches are gone, you will be welcomed into your eternal home in heaven." (New International Reader's Version)

We're going to spend some time today in Luke 16, where Jesus deals with the topic of money – a topic many church-goers don't like to hear about. The question in our text today boils down to this: "How should a Christian deal with money?" To illustrate this, Jesus tells the Parable of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1-13), about a man who gets fired when he's caught using his master's money for himself.

Since he has lived the good life for a long time, he doesn't want to go back to hard labor, and he's too proud to beg. So before anyone else gets word of what he's done, he makes shady deals with his master's creditors, keeping enough for himself, as we say, to "feather his own nest," so that he'll be taken care of.

After Jesus tells the Parable, he shocks us (in Luke 16:8-9) by saying,

The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are

more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

How could Jesus say that the dishonest manager's *dishonesty* was wise in the way he used his boss's money? And how can He say that that the dishonest manager is wiser in using money than Bible-believing, faithful Christians?

Notice the words again, and we'll see that this crook wasn't being complemented for his dishonesty, but for his planning ability. He was able to plan ahead – thinking before he acted. Jesus was saying something like this:

Look at this guy who doesn't even claim to be a Christian, and see what the lesson is. His main concern is for himself, and so he comes up with a plan. By planning carefully, he exchanges his money for earthly security, and it works. And [Jesus says to His disciples] you guys who follow me should also follow this man's example in dealing with your money. After all [Jesus continued], I've already told you about the exchange rate that really matters. Surely, you can be just as wise in planning for eternity as this dishonest manager was in exchanging his money for earthly, physical security.

Jesus wants US, to see how a Christian should use his money, by planning ahead. He uses shock treatment to drive home our lesson for today, which is this: A disciple of Jesus will exchange his money for ETERNAL treasures, because **that's** the exchange rate that **really** matters—exchanging our money for eternal treasures.

Let's listen again to what Jesus said: "I tell you, use the riches of this world to help others. In that way, you will make friends for yourselves. Then when your riches are gone, you will be welcomed into your eternal home in heaven" (Luke 16:9, NIRV).

In one of John Wesley's sermons, he used this same text to tell his hearers to use their money in ways that would help them to find eternal life. This sermon, called "The Use of Money," was required to be read in every Methodist society.

So we can see that money is not only important to people who don't claim to be believers; it's also important to Jesus and to completely sold-out believers like John Wesley. The Bible acknowledges that money is part of our life here on earth, and how we use it is important to our eternal destiny, too.

John Wesley said, in his famous sermon on money, that there are three rules a believer must follow in order to be a faithful steward, in using his money for eternal treasure. Those three rules are:

Make all you can,
Save all you can, and
Give all you can.

Today we're going to briefly see how these three rules might apply to us, for **our** time in history.

1. Wesley's first rule: "Make all you can."

Jesus not only implied that we're supposed to be wise in our management of money; we're supposed to work and use our abilities to make all we can.

It doesn't take a Ph.D. in economics to know what's wrong with the American economy. Anyone who's been around for a

while knows that today, in this country, too many people want to make more, but without working and producing more.

The number of government employees has grown far out of proportion to the need. Instead of making an increase in meeting people's needs, the government has grown, resulting in more rules and regulations, huge costs and taxes, but no increase in productivity,

And we see Americans expecting more and more but working less and less. Labor contracts promise more pay for less work.

Jesus means, "Don't be a drag on society, but do your part, working as hard as you can, to produce as much as you can, so that you'll make all you can." Jesus, the smartest man who ever lived, says that, if you want to make money, work hard and produce what people need. He says that if we ignore this basic rule, we will slowly but surely go downhill.

2. Wesley's second rule: "Save all you can."

In the Parable, Jesus complimented the manager for working hard and saving as much as possible. If he could do it, so can we. He wasn't talking about just saving for a rainy day. He was talking about not spending our money foolishly.

One husband complained to his wife, "But honey, if we buy a new car, how will we pay for it?" She answered, "There you go again, confusing things by bringing up two problems at the same time." Perhaps the worst example of this is our celebration of Christmas. People buy every new thing that comes along, not because they need it, but because everyone else is doing it, too. Then they spend the next year trying to pay for what they bought in December.

Many of us are like the husband who said to his wife, “If we skip the payment on the stove and refrigerator this month, we’ll have enough to pay down on a new TV.” Wesley taught that, instead of spending more and more, we should save our hard-earned money by not spending it foolishly.

For many of us, it’s not that we don’t make enough money, but that we’re not wise in how we spend what we do have.

3. Wesley’s third rule: “Give all you can.”

In Jesus’ Parable, the manager was wise in making money, and in saving it, but he saved it for the wrong reason. Jesus was saying a believer should **make** and **save** money, but he should do that in order to **give** as much as possible—in order to secure eternal treasures.

In the story of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30), we might make the mistake of thinking that having money is sinful. But the rich man went away “very sad” (18:23), not because he couldn’t part with his money, but because he had just passed up the chance to invest in eternity.

Jesus says to this rich young man and to us,
You either exchange your money for spiritual wealth, or your money will destroy you. Moths will eat it, rust will corrode it, and thieves will steal it. Instead, come with me and put your money to work helping the poor, and nothing will ever take your money away, and you will reap eternal rewards.

That’s how we can exchange our money for eternal treasures. God isn’t against having money; He wants us to have

wealth so that we can exchange it for eternal treasures. That's how His Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. The only time God gives us to do that is right now, in this life. As Wesley said, we should **give all we can**.

So, we can see that our life and living habits here are directly tied to the life to come. That means that, although we don't yet live in heaven, we can begin right now to invest our money in eternal things.

When the boy contributed his bread and fish to feed thousands [cf. Luke 9:13, John 6:8-9], he was giving all he had. Jesus transformed it into more than enough food to feed all those people. This miracle originated, not with Jesus, but with the boy. Jesus can only bless what we give Him, including right here in our church. We can be like the **rich young ruler** and just walk away, or we can be like **the boy** and have a part in what God is doing.

When we go to a foreign country, we exchange dollars for that country's currency. Someday, we will go to a new country called heaven. God wants us to exchange our money, right now, for the celestial treasure we'll enjoy there.

Jesus said, "I tell you, use the riches of this world to help others. In that way, you will make friends for yourselves. Then when your riches are gone, you will be welcomed into your eternal home in heaven." **How** can we do this? Jesus, speaking through John Wesley, gave us the answer:

MAKE ALL YOU CAN!
SAVE ALL YOU CAN!
GIVE ALL YOU CAN!

Let's Pray.

LESSON # 6 of 8 - HOW TO LIVE BEYOND FEAR

[What is the right kind of fear? What is the wrong kind of fear?]

[What is meant by “the fear of the Lord”?]

[What is the one way to be free of the wrong kind of fear?]

Luke 12:4-7 “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear him who, after killing the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

Isaiah 11:1-9 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from His roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord – and He will delight in the fear of the Lord.”

Our lesson today focuses on one of our strongest emotions—fear. It’s part of who we are, and who we are came from God. Since it came from Him, fear was meant for good. Fear can be used, or it can be misused; it can help us to SERVE God, or it can be a stumbling block.

This is what Jesus said in our text, “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear him who, after killing the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” (Luke 12:4-5).

Jesus is telling us there are TWO KINDS of fear – good and bad. To understand this better, we’re going to take a closer look at FOUR different ways it’s mentioned in the Bible.

1. The FIRST kind of fear we’ll consider in Scripture is the **SPIRIT** of fear.

Paul tells us, in Romans 8:15, that the SPIRIT of fear, is not the kind of fear we want to have. He says, “For you (talking about believers,) did not receive a spirit that makes you a SLAVE to fear, but YOU received the spirit of **Sonship**.” Paul says the wrong kind of fear turns us into slaves, but the GOOD kind of fear sets us free.

In II Timothy 1:7, Paul also says, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity [NRSV: *cowardice*], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”

In describing the wrong kind of fear, Paul is talking about spirits that can dominate how we think and act. That kind of fear we call a *phobia*. There are lots of phobias: the fear of heights, fear of being in a closed in space, fear of new things, fear of disease, fear of germs or of animals—too many for us to name here.

And Jesus isn’t talking about just one phobia, but ALL of them. Maybe it’s when the phone rings late at night, or a fear of flying in an airplane. Such fears can take away your joy and excitement when you get married, because you worry that your marriage might not work. This kind of fear can keep you out of ministry, because you’re afraid you might not succeed. Such fear can make us jealous and untrusting for no real reason. Jesus says that this fear can keep us from belonging to God. So we need to learn how to overcome it.

2. The SECOND kind of fear is fear of the Lord. This kind of fear is actually something we NEED, if we're going to have a relationship with God. The fear of the Lord helps us recognize God for Who He is. It helps us to stand in awe of Him; it helps us to raise Him to the very highest place in our lives. It helps us see God as the One Who gives us life, the ONE Who rules the universe, the ONE Who is all-powerful and almighty. Fear of the Lord brings us into a relationship with God, and even makes us heirs of eternal life. On the other hand, if we **turn our back** on the fear of the Lord, the door between Him and us is closed, and this can eventually lead to spiritual death.

Jesus says the fear of the Lord is the **right kind** of fear. Having the fear of the Lord is the ONLY way we can live without a SPIRIT of fear, the WRONG kind of fear. The fear of the Lord frees us from sin, and puts us under GOD'S control, so that we live in Jesus' Spirit.

Isaiah echoed the same idea, in **Isaiah 11:1-3**, when he said:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from His roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD – and He will delight in the fear of the LORD.

Both Isaiah and Jesus want us to have the fear of the Lord. It's Jesus' way of living in the power of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit Himself **is** the spirit of knowledge.

So, when Jesus tells us to fear the Lord, He wants us to take delight in being **like** him, like Jesus. Jesus wants us to be

filled with HIS Spirit, because that's the only way for us to live WITHOUT [the wrong kind of] fear.

3. The THIRD way of dealing with “fear” in the Bible is WISDOM. When we have wisdom, we live by GOD'S truth. Wisdom has less to do with learning, and more to do with DOING. We're wise when we live by **God's** ways. We're foolish when we don't, no matter how many college degrees we might have!

The Bible says **the fear of the Lord** is the BEGINNING of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). That simply means we yield control of our lives to God's Holy Spirit. We give HIM **first** place in our lives.

If we DON'T let the Lord have first place, we become controlled by a spirit of fear. We will be dominated by other people, and by our circumstances. We'll end up like the foolish man who built his house on the sand: our house falls, big time! [Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49]

4. The FOURTH term connected with “fear” in the Bible is ETERNAL LIFE. It's the **GOD-Life**, because only God is eternal. [AA: God alone is the Source of eternal life. Every kind of life from any other source will pass away.] Now WE were created to be eternal, too, but as we know Adam and Eve changed everything when they decided to do things THEIR OWN way. When that happened, something changed for all of us whose life came from our earthly ancestors. We all became vulnerable to sin, death, and the evil rule of Satan, instead of being ruled by GOD's pure Love. Without God stepping in to rescue us, we would all end up in hell.

But here is the Good News! The GOOD News is that God has given ALL of us a second chance. Jesus did that, when He came to earth, and by His life and sacrifice gave us eternal life – the GOD kind of life. He restored us to **God's** image through the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus said, "**I** tell you whom to fear: fear Him who holds your eternal destiny in His hands."

Jesus is telling us that the fear of the Lord - when we put ourselves under the control of God's Spirit – is the **ONLY** way we can have eternal life, because only GOD is eternal.

So, yes - Fear is part of who we are. God Himself saw to that. But Satan tries to twist this God-given fear into a SPIRIT of fear, so that we'll spend our lives reacting to THIS world, instead of responding to **GOD'S** Spirit.

And so, we can see that the **only** way to live BEYOND the spirit of fear, is to live by GOD'S Spirit, and THAT'S the Fear of the Lord.

How does all of this happen? Well, the BIBLE says **the fear of the Lord can be ours** in at least THREE different ways:

1. The first way is by having a relationship with Jesus. John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word WAS God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."

So, we know it's JESUS Who GIVES us life. He rules the whole universe. He's all-powerful – He's God in the flesh, and that makes it possible for us to have a relationship with Him.

When we have the fear the Lord, it's the kind of fear that is GOD'S plan. With HIS plan in control, we won't let the **wrong** kinds of fear dominate our lives.

2. The second way the fear of the Lord comes to us is in the form of wisdom. Both Isaiah and Paul tell us that this kind of fear is the RIGHT kind – bringing a life of Power, and Love, and of a Sound Mind. [Isa. 11:1-3; 2 Tim. 1:7]

This was John Wesley's main theme in most of his preaching. He boldly told people to FLEE from the wrath to come – and to face up honestly to what will happen to us if we DON'T have Christ as our Savior. The words of an old hymn say this so well:

“It causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble” when I put MYSELF at the foot of the cross and realize what would happen to me WITHOUT Christ.

It's awesome to think that ONLY CHRIST can save us from a spirit of fear and give us a life of power, and love, and a sound mind. And, if THAT doesn't move us to REAL awe – which is TRUE fear of the Lord – then I guess NOTHING can.

3. Third, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of ETERNAL life. The Bible says clearly that eternal life MUST begin NOW, or it will NEVER begin at all. That alone should cause us to “tremble, tremble, tremble.”

Jesus died on a cross, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sent us His Holy Spirit—all so that He could give us eternal life and restore God's image in us. He said that the

moment anyone accepts Jesus and His gift of the Holy Spirit, eternal life **begins** and **continues** for all eternity.

So, according to the Bible, we don't have to wait until we die for eternal life to begin. It starts here and now, when we make the decision to move **away** from sin and **into** a genuine fear of the Lord. In the right kind of fear—the fear of the Lord—we gratefully receive the kind of love **He** offers. And that love is available to anyone who will accept it.

We know many churches have their share of people who have faithfully attended church for most of their life but have never had a born-again relationship with God, in Jesus. If that describes you, our sincere hope is that you make this the day **you** sign on to spend eternity with Jesus.

LET'S PRAY

LESSON #7 of 8 – A DISCIPLE’S GREATEST DANGER

[What is the greatest danger for a disciple of Jesus?]

[How would you define “spiritual pride”?]

[What are the effects of spiritual pride?]

[How can we avoid or escape from spiritual pride?]

From Luke 10:17-24:

“The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’ (Luke 10:17-18a, 20).

Jesus had sent 70 of His disciples out to do some of the same things they had seen him do. When they came back to Him, they were really excited about what had happened out there. In fact, they came back to Him with JOY! They were actually celebrating, because they were able to do the same things Jesus had been doing. They said to Him, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!”

They could hardly contain themselves.

I suppose we could have a pretty good idea of their excitement, if you and I were to go to a local hospital and empty out several floors of sick people—sending them home, healed and well.

Instead of joining the disciples’ celebration, Jesus actually warned them about something we’re using this morning as the

title of our lesson – we’re calling it “*a disciple’s greatest danger.*” In fact, Jesus is waving a red flag at them – probably not at all what they expected Him to do.

So, what was this danger He was warning them about? We can put it in just two words: SPIRITUAL PRIDE. And what is Spiritual Pride? We might say the disciples were singing the wrong tune. Instead of singing “How Great Thou Art,” they were singing “How Great We Are.” They were saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to US! - but, of course, we’re doing it in YOUR name, Jesus.”

Notice that they put themselves first.

Now, what Jesus told them to do, He still tells US to do, in OUR time and place. His warning to them is meant for us, too.

Yes, as Jesus’ followers, we too are called to do His ministry. But none of us can really minister to anyone. We can only be an instrument for HIM to minister. HE is the minister, because only HE knows what people’s real needs are.

“A disciple’s greatest danger” is spiritual pride.

What is spiritual pride?

Spiritual Pride puts the focus on US as the minister instead of on Him. Spiritual Pride says, “Even the demons are subject to me – in Your name,” instead of saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to YOU, through me.”

True ministry is not about what WE do, even in His name. It’s about what HE does, through us. That’s where the focus belongs.

We can say the same thing about our church, too. It's not about what we're doing for Jesus as a church, or how great we are as a church – that would be Spiritual Pride.

Instead, it's about what Jesus is doing here, through us, as a church, so that we can say, "How Great Thou Art, Lord, to allow us to be Your body here on earth."

What does spiritual pride do to us?

Jesus tells us that Spiritual Pride cuts us off from His grace. He says, in Luke 10:18, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." In other words, even Satan, once the chief of angels, was ejected from heaven, and from God's grace, because of pride, when he rebelled against God.

That's what Spiritual Pride does to us. "So," Jesus tells His disciples, "don't let these ministry victories go to your head, leaving you focused on yourself instead of me. Like Satan, you too could fall like lightning from heaven."

So, Spiritual Pride cuts us off from God's grace, and it does that in three basic ways:

- 1. It cuts us off from the promise, the assurance, of eternal life.** Jesus says, "Don't celebrate what you've done, but what God has done for you – that your names are written in heaven! Celebrate that, by grace, God has given you Eternal Life. Don't celebrate what you're able to do, but celebrate what God has already done for you.

God has already given you eternal life in Jesus, and He gives us a down payment on it by the Holy Spirit [2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14]. But when we indulge in

Spiritual Pride, we cut ourselves off from Jesus' love and from the witness of His Holy Spirit.

2. **The second thing** Spiritual Pride does is that **it cuts us off from God's truth**, the truth God Himself has shown to us. In Luke 10:21, Jesus prayed: "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children, Father, because this was Your good pleasure."

We have the faith we have because God has shown it to us, through His Son, Jesus, and through His Holy Word – made flesh in Jesus, and in the Bible.

Jesus tells us that only people who humbly receive God's truth, as He Himself shows it to us, can know His truth. Intellect and logic have no place in this transaction; we must humbly come to God and ask Him to reveal Himself to us.

Now, that doesn't mean we can't use our minds when we communicate with God, but Spiritual Pride tells us to focus on what WE know, instead of focusing on the truth God shows to us. When we focus on God's Word to us, He allows us to use our minds to understand what He says, and to apply it to our lives.

3. **The third thing** Spiritual Pride does is that it **cuts us off from God's power**.

Jesus said, in Luke 10:22, "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the

Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.”

OUR authority and power are in Jesus. He’s our only resource, and we can have His power only when we have a relationship with Him – a relationship that’s based on faith in HIM as our power source. Nothing else can cut us off from that relationship as quickly as Spiritual Pride, as when we sing, “How Great WE are.”

Jesus Himself said, in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus is the ONLY way to eternal life. Only HE can affirm that we’re God’s children. He’s our POWER source. If we want to follow His way, know His truth, and live His kind of life, we have to be focused on Him.

So, **our greatest danger** as His followers is **Spiritual Pride**, because it cuts us off from His assurance, His truth, and His power!!

So, what can we do about spiritual pride?

How can we keep from being spiritually proud when Jesus does His work through us? Actually, there’s a one-word answer to that question. That word is PRAISE!

Through praise, we can avoid spiritual pride, and thus avoid being cut off from Jesus as our source. Through praise, we turn our focus from ourselves to God.

After Jesus warns his followers about Spiritual Pride, He shows them the remedy, in Luke 10:21a, where it says, “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth....’”

That’s what praise is – “being full of joy in the Holy Spirit!” Praise is turning our thoughts, words, and actions to God, through Jesus. Praise is giving credit where it’s due – focusing on our source, rather than on ourselves.

What happens when we praise? Psalm 22:3 says that God inhabits the praises of His people [KJV; other versions: “enthroned”]. When we praise, God comes to us in the person of the Holy Spirit, and we can have joy in Him, because it’s a fruit of the Spirit [Gal. 5:22]. And that’s why praise has such a significant role in worship.

Many Christians are afraid to let go and praise God by rejoicing in the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they think the Bible says, “The Lord inhabits the gloom, reserve, sophistication, and spiritual pride of His people.”

Many of us are afraid to let go and really praise God, and so God can’t inhabit our praises. We’re afraid to praise, and so we have no weapon to use against Spiritual Pride. We’re afraid to praise, and so we’re cut off from our source – the grace of Jesus. We’re afraid to praise, and so we fall prey to the danger of Spiritual Pride.

But if we would just let go and praise God in the Holy Spirit, we would open ourselves to God’s greatest gift. Jesus tells us what that gift is, in Luke 10:23 and 24.

Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

What did they see? They saw Jesus, God in the flesh. What did they hear? They heard Jesus, the Word of God revealed.

What does praise do? It opens our lives to God's best blessing—the **presence of Jesus**, where we are **safe from Spiritual Pride**.

If you want this protection, begin to indulge yourself in praise – praise in the Holy Spirit – and God will inhabit your praise with His best gift – the gift of Jesus!!

LET'S PRAY

LESSON # 8 of 8 – THE POWER IN PRAYER/THE NEED OF EVERY DISCIPLE

[What is the best gift you can ask God to give you?]

[What does every disciple of Jesus need?]

[What negative effects come from thinking of God as “out there somewhere”?]

[What is the “real power” in prayer?]

Luke 11:5-13

“So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”
(Luke 11:9-10)

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.” (Luke 11:13)

This lesson combines two lessons: one is on prayer and its connection with the Holy Spirit; the other part is focused on just the Holy Spirit.

We’ve already studied The Lord’s Prayer. Now we move into answering the question, “What can we expect when we pray?”

The theme of this lesson is this: “The power in prayer is receiving God’s Holy Spirit.”

We remember the story about the man who comes late at night and asks his friend to lend him some bread, so that he can have something to give his guests. Even though the friend

doesn't really want to be bothered, he finally gives the bread to the man who asks for it. [Luke 11:5-8]

Jesus ends the story by saying, "Ask and it will be given to **you**; seek and **you** will find; knock and the door will be opened to **you**" (Luke 11:9).

So, why did Jesus tell this story? He told it because He wants us to know that God is much better than our best human friends.

When Jesus was born, they called Him Emmanuel – God with us [Matt. 1:23]. [AA: Seeing Jesus, we know what God is like.]

God came to be with us at Pentecost, too. The gift of the Holy Spirit is all around us – He is God's gift with us and to us. We don't have to beg and plead for a reluctant God to come to us – prayer is opening our lives to our God, Who is ALREADY, ALWAYS with us.

We often think that we live here, and God lives "out there somewhere." But that's a huge mistake. Since we're created in God's image, it means we are spiritual beings as well as physical. We can be blessed by the Holy Spirit of God, but we can also be cursed by the evil spirit of Satan – it all depends on whom we open our lives to.

Jesus came to show us how to open our lives to the blessings of God's Holy Spirit, and the life-giving, healing power we need right now. THAT'S the REAL power in prayer. And it's for right now and for forever.

When we think of God living somewhere else, we end up being separated from Him – it turns prayer into begging God to

come into our world. Instead, we need to realize that we already have Him and His power right here, right now. When we think of God as being separate from us, then evil, sickness, and death seem to be the *natural* way. In reality, the Bible says that evil, sickness, and death are *Satan's* way.

Believing that God is separate from us takes the life-giving, healing power out of worship, the sacraments, and prayer, because God is believed to be “out there somewhere.” And Jesus says we need to reject this false view of life if we want to have **real** power in prayer,

So, if the CHRISTIAN way is different, what's different about it? We can be grateful that Jesus spells it out for us in simple, every-day words.

Jesus says:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. [Luke 11:9-10]

And Jesus asks,

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? [Luke 11:11-13]

Now, THAT'S the REAL Good News: God is ALWAYS with us, loving us; that's what Jesus came to show us. But Satan is with us, too, and he's our enemy; he wants to destroy us. Satan DOES try to give us serpents and scorpions.

Jesus wants us to know that we live in both physical and spiritual worlds. So, our physical needs have to be met. But we also live in a world where our spiritual needs must be met. That's what God wants to do for us.

So, He says we can have eternal life, here and now, if we close our lives to **the evil all around us** and open our lives to **the life-giving, healing, spiritual Kingdom of God**, which is **also all around us**. The enemy points the way to death, but Jesus points the way to eternal life. God's life comes to us when we pray, when we open up to God's Spirit, to His life-giving, healing power.

So, now we can put the pieces of our faith together, because of Jesus. He's always with us. He's here to deliver us from evil spirits, and to give us eternal life, beginning **right now**. And worship, scripture, and prayer are the tools He's given us to make all of this possible.

Prayer makes it possible for us to have an alive, dynamic relationship with God – so that He can bless whatever part of us we give to Him, including our marriage, our money, and everything else.

Now, in this part of our lesson, we need to talk briefly about the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. [AA: In Luke 11:13, Jesus says the heavenly Father wants to “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” Just as a good earthly parent would not give a harmful serpent or scorpion to a hungry child (11:11-12), so our heavenly Father will give us the Holy Spirit if we ask. (The parallel in Matthew 7:11 says “good things.”)]

In this way, Jesus indicates there's one thing every follower of Jesus needs. The one thing we need most is to have God living **inside** us, by the Holy Spirit.

Paul echoes this in Romans 5:1-5, where he says,

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance [produces] character, and character [produces] hope. And hope does not disappoint us, **because** God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Whom He has given us.*

Notice the word “because” at the end of that passage. Paul is telling us that forgiveness, eternal life, power over problems, and the love we need for living in this world, are all because of one thing, and one thing only. He says it's “because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Whom He has given us” (Romans 5:5).

In other words, the Holy Spirit is given to us by God TO MEET OUR EVERY NEED. But if we close ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we also close our lives to God's answers.

We all have lots of needs in our lives, but just now, we want to focus on FOUR needs we have, as followers of Jesus:

1. The first need is our need for FORGIVENESS. Jesus defeated sin every time it crossed His path; even in His death, resurrection, and ascension He had victory. And then He taught **us** how to deal with sin in OUR lives, too.

He has **already** won the battle over sin for us. He's given us a way to do that too, right now, 2,000 years later. And He does this through something called forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit came to make forgiveness real for us, but without the Holy Spirit's power **no** forgiveness is possible. The **same** Holy Spirit Who was active in Jesus' life is available to us too, right now. But He can only do this if we let Him. And so, **every** follower of Jesus needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that we can live Jesus' life of victory.

2. The second reason we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit is so that we will have assurance of salvation and eternal life.

My wife and I got a phone call from a friend in Arkansas. Her dad was dying, and he believed that he had lived such a selfish life that God might not be willing to forgive him.

So, we drove over to Arkansas, and went to see our friend's dad. In our conversation, he readily admitted that he hadn't lived a life that he was proud of, and so we asked him if he was now ready to admit that to God. He said he was. So that's what he did, right then and there.

We told him that anyone who admits that they have sinned, and are willing to ask God to forgive them, can be assured that God will do that, right then and there.

We helped him to pray and ask God for forgiveness, and we assured him that God not only **heard** his prayer, but that he was now, based on God's own promise, **fully** forgiven.

His family told us that, when he died a few days later, he had demonstrated a noticeable sense of peace and assurance that his sins **had** been forgiven. As a result, he was no longer afraid to face God.

Romans 8:16-17 tells us that “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we **are** God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.”

3. The third reason we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit is because of our need for power. Power gives us the ability to **know** and **do** the truth, what pleases God. He gives us the power to know and do what’s **right**, and the power **not** to do what we shouldn’t do.

1 Corinthians 4:20 tells us, “The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power.” The real test of Christianity is not what we say, but what we do. And the power that enables us to DO what’s right is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised to give us that power when He said, in Acts 1:8, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (By the way, that includes Tulsa, too!)

Without the Holy Spirit, we are simply trying to do God’s work in **our own** strength. So we first need to allow Him to live **in** us, so that we can do what HE wants us to do.

4. The fourth reason we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit is because we need love.

If we want to define love the way the Bible defines it, we might say it's Christlikeness. Jesus is love, and He showed that to us when He came to earth and lived as a person. The Bible says that God is love [1 John 4:8], and Jesus is God in the flesh.

If we're going to be Jesus' followers and do His work, we need to have **His** heart and mind. We need to be able to see others through HIS eyes and feel with HIS feelings. We need to be **like** Him.

But that's not something we can do on our own. We need **supernatural** power to be like Him, and that power only comes to us through the Holy Spirit living **in** us.

Forgiveness, assurance, power, and love – that's what Jesus wants **us** to have and show to others. These can **only** come to us by having the Holy Spirit living in us.

As believers, we have **dual** citizenship, but some of us have never claimed our spiritual citizenship. In a sense, we're like a person without a country. We live only in THIS world, without ever using the awesome benefits that can be ours as citizens in God's Kingdom. All we need to do is to claim our citizenship, and we do that by submitting to the dominion of the Holy Spirit, Who is the Ruler in God's Kingdom.

Our closing question is this: Have you claimed your citizenship? If not, how can you believe that waiting any longer is acceptable?

LET'S PRAY.