The Call to Discipleship  
by Timothy J. Keller, D.Min.  
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There is a growing recognition in churches today about the need for discipleship. In what follows, I would like to describe from the Gospel of Luke what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Luke has some helpful insights about discipleship. The first eight chapters are focused on “who is Jesus?” But there’s a shift in chapter 9, where Peter with the help of the Holy Spirit realizes that Jesus is not one more in a succession of prophets and teachers. Peter says, “You are the Christ of God.” You are the Messiah, the one who is bringing the ruling power of God back into the world to heal and repair all the brokenness—whether it’s spiritual, psychological, social, or physical.

From the time Jesus’ identity is revealed, he begins to say, “Follow me.” If he is who he says he is, what does it mean to follow him? Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means setting a new priority, finding a new identity, and living a new mercy. All three are critical; they all fit together. Let’s look at them.

**Setting a New Priority**


The first man says, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus says, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” It’s as if Jesus is saying, “There’s nothing wrong with what you just said, but I discern a wrong attitude underneath your statement. Do you know what kind of Savior I am? I’m not the kind that rallies constituents, pulls together armies, and then triumphs. I am a Savior who saves through being condemned, through dying, through giving my heart to be broken. Let’s apply this to one area of your life: I see that you have a home, a nice standard of living. Are you willing to put me before that? Are you willing to lose those things for me?”

Then Jesus addresses two other men, similarly concerned with their families. One says, “I’d love to come with you, but first I have to bury my father.” The other says, “First let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” There is nothing wrong with having a funeral for your father or going back to see your family, but behind these requests Jesus sees a wrong attitude of heart. He’s saying, “For (continued on page 8)
Notes from the President

by Kerry A. Knott  
President, C.S. Lewis Institute

Dear Friends,

This issue concludes our special, year-long focus on key aspects of discipleship. There is still a lot of confusion on this topic, but we hope we’ve cleared this up somewhat through this series in Knowing & Doing. To sum up our overall teaching on discipleship: we want people to find the joy that comes from following Christ and from allowing the Holy Spirit to make us more and more like Jesus. Timothy Keller, in our lead article, paints a compelling picture, as only he can, of the nature of discipleship. Here’s just one insight: “Discipleship is not just a matter of bending your will to Jesus’ will; it’s melting your heart into a whole new shape. A disciple is not someone who simply sets a new priority; a disciple finds a new identity.”

This new identity is as a citizen of heaven, even while we’re participating in building God’s kingdom here on earth. Each of the articles in this issue illustrates in concrete terms how we can live our lives as authentic disciples of Christ.

Tom Tarrants’ article on pride and humility is a tour de force on the evils of pride and the antidote to pride, which is humility. Tom’s other article on obedience highlights the cost, blessings, and key to obedience, which is a topic we don’t hear much about anymore.

Joel Woodruff, the newest member of our staff, profiles V. Raymond Edman, longtime president of Wheaton College and mentor to Billy Graham. Edman’s life as an obedient disciple of Christ shows what can be accomplished when everything is abandoned to Christ.

Tom Schwanda, who recently led a tremendous seminar on mentoring, reminds us through his study of George Whitefield that in our pursuit of discipleship we must always be grounded in the Word of God. He outlines Whitefield’s seven steps to help us study the Scriptures.

I hope you’ve enjoyed this discipleship series. We are entering an exciting new phase at the Institute, having now built a core group of effective discipleship resources for churches, home groups, and individuals, as well as launching new centers of discipleship in London, Seattle, and Cincinnati this year. We are committed to spreading the message that discipleship is urgently needed in our churches and ministries today. The movement is underway! We trust that you will continue to join us in this mission.

Sincerely,

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Pride and Humility
by Thomas A. Tarrants, III, D.Min.
Vice President of Ministry, C.S. Lewis Institute

“Pride is your greatest enemy, humility is your greatest friend.” So said the late John R.W. Stott, a remarkably humble man of great abilities and accomplishments who is often said to have made the greatest impact for Christ of anyone in the twentieth century. His succinct statement about pride and humility goes straight to the heart of what the Bible teaches about the deadly root of our sins and sorrows.

How many recent sermons have you heard on pride or humility? Probably not many. One hears surprisingly little from church or parachurch leaders about either of these subjects. In fact, what throughout history has been recognized as the deadliest of vices is now almost celebrated as a virtue in our culture. Pride and arrogance are conspicuous among the rich, the powerful, the successful, the famous, and celebrities of all sorts, and even some religious leaders. And it is also alive and well in ordinary people, including each of us. Yet few of us realize how dangerous it is to our souls and how greatly it hinders our intimacy with God and love for others. Humility, on the other hand, is often seen as weakness, and few of us know much about it or pursue it. For the good of our souls, then, we need to gain a clearer understanding of pride and humility and of how to forsake the one and embrace the other.

Pride

C.S. Lewis, another top contender for having had the greatest impact for Christ in the twentieth century, called pride “the great sin.” Every believer should read his chapter by that title in Mere Christianity. There Lewis said,

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind…

…it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.¹

If this sounds like exaggeration, it will help us to know that Lewis is not simply giving us his private opinion but summarizing the thinking of great saints through the ages. Augustine and Aquinas both taught that pride was the root of sin.² Likewise Calvin, Luther, and many others. Make no mistake about it: pride is the great sin. It is the devil’s most effective and destructive tool.

Why do the great spiritual leaders, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant alike, unite around this conviction? Because it is so clearly and solidly taught in Scripture. Pride first appears in the Bible in Genesis 3, where we see the devil, that “proud spirit” as John Donne described him, using pride as the avenue by which to seduce our first parents. Taking the form of a serpent, his approach was simple yet deadly. First, he arrogantly contradicted what God had said to Eve about eating the forbidden fruit and charged God with lying. This shocking rejection of God’s word introduced Eve to the hitherto unknown possibility of unbelief and was intended to arouse doubt in her mind about the truthfulness and reliability of God. In the next breath, the devil drew her into deeper deception by contending that God’s reason for lying was to keep her from enjoying all the

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With the help of a friend, she dyed her wedding dress black, the color of mourning, to wear that afternoon at her young husband’s funeral. The date was July 4, 1925, and their baby son, Charles, was only seven weeks old.

Just over a year earlier, Edith was radiant as a bride in her stunning, white wedding dress. Her adoring sweetheart, V. Raymond Edman, had eagerly awaited the wedding at mission headquarters in Quito, Ecuador. But then Ray, whom Edith affectionately called “Friend Prexy,” had contracted typhus fever. Dr. Herbert Parker, an expert in tropical diseases, had to break the hard news to her that Ray’s feet were already cold; he wasn’t long for this earth. A friend, Will Reed, ordered a native coffin made of wood, covered in black cloth, to be ready for the burial. The climate of the tropics demands a quick interment.

The funeral service was planned and scheduled for 3:00 p.m.

Ray and Edith met at Park Street Church in Boston through a mutual friend and mentor, E. Joseph Evans, otherwise known as “Uncle Joe.” Prior to meeting they had each heard God’s still small voice calling them to serve in missions, specifically in South America. As they grew in love for each other, “They prayed together and agreed to separate for a time to test the sincerity of their love and to determine the will of God fully. By spring 1923, they were convinced it was God’s will for them to become engaged, to get married later and finally to serve together in South America.”

Their mutual calling led them to the Quechua Indians in Ecuador. They were married, welcomed their first child, and things were looking bright. God was blessing their work, and they were developing good relationships with the Indians. Then suddenly, death was lurking on their doorstep.

Ray knew that he was dying, though he was unaware that people were busy preparing for his funeral. He recalled what his mother had told him as a child—that often when people are about to die, their life plays out before their eyes; they remember the people and events that shaped them. This happened to Ray as he thought of his childhood home in Illinois, his grade school teachers, friends from school, his days serving in the army in World War I. Ray wrote, “It was something like the unfolding of a newsreel, and with it there came the clear consciousness, ‘Now I have come to die.’”

At this point Ray became aware of what he described as a “Presence” that slowly entered the room, rising from the ground up to the level of his bed; soon it completely filled the room. At first Ray wondered what this surrounding influence or “Presence” might be. He wrote, “Then I knew what it was, for in those moments I experienced a sweet sense of the love of God in Christ such as I had never known before in all the years of my life… It is sufficient to say that I have no fear of dying. Heaven is home to the believer, to that one who has become a child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Ray, like Lazarus in John 11, had faced death. But unlike Lazarus, Ray was never buried in that black coffin. Edith didn’t have to wear her blackened wedding dress that day. About a week later, Ray was able to recognize his wife and was gradually
restored to health, a testimony of Jesus’ resurrection power.

And now the rest of the story. Weeks later Ray learned that on the very day of his “personal hand to hand conflict with death” on July 4, 1925, “Uncle Joe” was at a Bible Conference at the Alliance Camp Hebron in Attleboro, Massachusetts. Suddenly Uncle Joe was burdened to intercede on behalf of Ray. He pleaded with the congregation of about two hundred to stop what they were doing and pray for V. Raymond Edman in Ecuador. He discerned by the Holy Spirit’s prompting that Ray was facing some kind of crisis and needed to be delivered. What followed were some fiercely intense hours of prayer. Years later those present still remembered the fervency of their intercessions. They prayed and fasted through midday, and then in the midafternoon they felt a release of spirit, suddenly assured “that their prayers for the desperate need thirty-five hundred miles away had been answered.”

Evangelical scholar Walter Elwell writes, “From that moment on, although often called upon to suffer physically and emotionally, Edman’s life was characterized by a sense of God’s presence and never failing good cheer. He had seen beyond the veil, and what had greeted him was the unfathomable love of God.”

The Early Years

What was so special about Victor Raymond Edman that God would so dramatically spare his life? Edman himself would have stated that it was simply God’s grace. He didn’t come from an influential or wealthy family or attend prestigious schools. He was born on May 9, 1900, to Anders and Alma Edman, Swedish immigrants who settled in Chicago. He was the second son of six children, was nearsighted, and wore thick glasses his whole life. He liked to read, was a good student, and showed leadership ability as he entered high school. He loved sports and public speaking and always had a sense for adventure. His family worshiped at the Swedish Missionary Church, and he grew up in a family devoted to prayer and Scripture reading. In his senior year of high school, in June 1918, he accepted Christ as his Savior at an evangelistic service led by Dr. I.E. Honeywell. Later Edman reflected, “Perhaps my happiest moment was on a summer’s night when there came assurance of salvation.”

Edman the Soldier

Just a month after his conversion to Christ, Ray and his friend, Walter Hoepner enlisted in the US Army to serve their country in World War I. Once in the service, Ray, trained as a medic, longed to get overseas. In a letter to a friend he wrote, “I’ve asked the Lord every day to put me on a shipment, and if He wants me to go, I have entrusted my future to Him, and I know that He will do the best for me.” Soon after this prayer, he landed in Europe just after the Armistice of November 11, 1918. Just before Christmas his unit endured a long march in the snow and cold of Eastern Germany. When they arrived at a lice-ridden, former POW camp for Russian soldiers, Edman was exhausted, ill, and feverish. All he wanted to do was fall on a bed and sleep. But a
Jesus reveals the critical link between knowing Scripture and discipleship when he asserts, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples” (John 8:31). It is impossible for anyone to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ without an awareness of and commitment to regular engagement with the Bible. Although there are many contemporary resources and guides for studying the Bible, much wisdom can be gained from the writings of earlier Christians.

George Whitefield (1714–1770) is certainly representative of this. He along with John and Charles Wesley, John Newton, and others provided significant leadership for the eighteenth-century English revival. His persuasive sermons and eloquent language helped to pioneer open-air preaching. This became a necessity when many of his fellow Church of England clergymen prevented him from preaching in their pulpits due to his strong emphasis on the new birth and conversion in Christ. He normally preached a sermon a day and often up to three sermons on Sundays, regularly attracting crowds of five thousand to ten thousand listeners. He also made seven preaching trips to North America and exerted a strong influence on the colonial Great Awakening. Whitefield nourished and prepared his soul for this strenuous ministry through his avid reading of Puritan devotional classics and his daily meditation on Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible.

While many rich treasures in his sermons are still appropriate for today, one, preached on John 5:39—“The Duty of Searching the Scriptures”—is particularly germane. Whitefield recognized the absolute priority of grounding the Christian life on the inspired Word of God. His insights are still valuable today. The goal of this article is to examine Whitefield’s principles for searching the Scriptures so that we might recover them to guide our own study of and meditation on the Bible. For, in reality, the more inflamed our souls are by the Word of God, the more we will be able to continue in Christ’s word so that we might truly be his disciples.

Whitefield begins this sermon by recounting the conversation between Jesus and the Sadducees about the woman who had seven husbands (Matt. 22:23–28). Clearly their intention was to trick Jesus by asking whose wife she will be at the resurrection. Jesus responded by declaring, “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). Whitefield quickly affirms this truth by announcing that throughout the history of the church errors “flowed from the same fountain, ignorance of the word of God” (379). However, we know more accurately from the reading of church history that some errors result from an intentional mishandling or abuse of Scripture.

Even though Jesus was “the eternal God,” he too made Scripture his daily guide. Whitefield further asserts that Jesus de-
pended upon the Holy Spirit to guide him in his use of Scripture. Throughout this sermon Whitefield emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in reading and applying the Bible.

Following this introduction Whitefield presents his two points. The first is that every person must search the Scriptures (379). This is not just the responsibility for pastors or teachers, but for all God’s people. All who seek to follow Jesus as his disciples must be active students who apply God’s Word to their lives. Whitefield discovered the importance of this personally while still a student at Oxford and a member of the Holy Club with the Wesleys. Their emphasis was on a persistent and daily reading that combined both an intellectual search for knowledge and spiritual application of experience. To accomplish this, their reading of Scripture included prayerful meditation on the text.5 This was a pattern that Whitefield practiced throughout his life.

The majority of the sermon is in the second section, where Whitefield presents seven specific principles for searching the Scriptures.

First, he counsels us to always remember to emphasize the main theme of Scripture, which is Jesus Christ, the way of salvation. Jesus challenged his listeners to search the Scriptures. One reason was to help them discover that the Word, properly sought, always leads a person to Jesus Christ, the Living Word. Whitefield practices what we might call christological exegesis. That is, when reading the Old Testament, one observes how the prophecies, sacrifices, and other events prefigure and point to Jesus. What is nascent in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. For any biblical passage, Whitefield’s goal is that we should always be alert to how the Bible helps us to grasp and better understand Jesus.

Second, we need to approach the Bible with a “humble child–like disposition” (381). This principle of humility has been clearly championed throughout every age of the church. Amma Syncletica, one of the early desert mothers of the Christian East, vividly illustrates this in reference to the biblical example of Luke 18:9–14. She says, “Imitate the publican, and you will not be condemned with the Pharisee. Choose the meekness of Moses and you will find your heart which is a rock changed into a spring of water.” Humility creates a teachable spirit that is eager to search and willing to welcome new truths that the Holy Spirit presents to us. The humble person is not only receptive to the pleasant words of comfort, but is also willing to embrace the more difficult, but equally important, words of conviction or correction. If we approach the Bible in an attitude of superiority, we will fail to appreciate its message. The simplicity of a childlike wonder creates a hunger and desire and openness for learning. This

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reflects both Jesus’ teaching on the humility of a little child (Matt. 18:2–5) and the receptive nature of the good soil that welcomes the Word of God in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:20). Unfortunately children often lose this wonderful quality as they go to school and face the inimical challenges of competition and comparison with other students.

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you to go to your father’s funeral—or back home—would be a bad idea. I must come first.” Notice their language. In both cases they say, “Lord, first, let me do this.” Jesus says there can’t be any but first. “I must be your first priority.” That’s what he means when he says: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Anyone who plows a field must be completely focused on plowing. And following Jesus is no different, “My disciple has to be utterly focused on me.” By the way, “fit for the kingdom” is an unfortunate translation; the word there means “useful.” You might think he’s saying, “Unless you’re totally committed, you don’t qualify for my kingdom.” Of course no one qualifies for Jesus’ kingdom. It’s all by grace. He’s saying: Unless delighting Jesus, resembling him, serving him, and knowing him is your highest priority, the healing power of the kingdom of God will not be flowing through you. You will not be a useful vehicle for it.

The second and more cryptic line is, “Let the dead bury their own dead.” Obviously physically dead people can’t dig graves, so the first noun must refer to the spiritually dead. To be spiritually dead means to be as blind and insensitive to spiritual reality as a physical body is to physical reality. You may be saying, “Well, I believe in Jesus, but I can’t put him first right now. I’ve got my career; I’ve got to wait till my parents die, because they would be unhappy if I became a Christian… I see who he is and what he’s done, but I’m not going to put him first just yet. Someday I will.” When someone says, “I understand Christianity. I’m just not ready to put it at the central place in my life,” then that person really doesn’t understand it yet! Jesus says: Putting anything before me reveals spiritual deadness. Let the dead bury their dead. If you put your father before me, there’s a spiritual deadness in your life.

Talking this harshly is not my style, but I’m afraid to mute the smelling–salts-ness of Jesus’ message: Let the dead bury the dead! No one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God! Foxes have holes, birds have nests… But “I have to be the first priority in your life, or you’re not a disciple; if you don’t put me first in your life, it’s not that you’re just uncommitted or lazy, disorganized or undisciplined. No, you just don’t get it! You don’t really see who I am and what I’ve done; you don’t understand the meaning of my life and work. You need to wake up!

Let me illustrate. In 1971 I heard a talk—two illustrations—that changed my life. The woman, named Barbara Boyd, said, “If somebody says to me, ‘Come on in, Barbara, but stay out, Boyd,’ it’s a bit of a problem, because I can’t separate them. It’s not like the top half of me is Barbara, and the bottom half of me is Boyd. So if you won’t have Boyd, you can’t get Barbara. If you’re going to keep the Boyd out, I can’t come in at all!” She continued: “To say, ‘Jesus, come into my life, forgive my sins, answer my prayers; do this for me, do that for me—but don’t be the absolute master of my life; Jesus, Savior, come in; but Lord, stay out,’ how can he come in at all? Because he’s all Savior, and he’s all Lord. He’s Lord because he’s Savior. He’s Savior because he’s Lord.”

I remember her second illustration: “If the distance between the Earth and the sun, which is 92 million miles, was the thickness of a piece of paper, the diameter of our galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high. And our galaxy is less than a speck of dust in the part of the universe that we can see. And that part of the universe might just be a speck of dust compared to all the universe. And if Jesus is the Son of God who holds all this together with the word of his power, is this the kind of person you ask into your life to be your personal assistant?” Then she asked us all to go outside and for one hour say nothing. “Just think about what this means to you.”
She was expanding on Jesus’ message: If you intellectually assent, “Yes, I think Jesus is probably the Son of God; I think he probably died for our sins,” but he is not the center of your life, then you may think you understand, but you really don’t. It’s not just a matter of commitment or lack of discipline, there’s spiritual deadness; you don’t really see it, understand it, get it. Wake yourself up!

Finding a New Identity

Discipleship is not just a matter of bending your will to Jesus’ will; it’s melting your heart into a whole new shape. A disciple is not someone who simply sets a new priority; a disciple finds a new identity. We see this in Luke 9:23–25. At first sight verse 23 looks like it’s just another way of saying set a new priority: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” But there’s more to it than that. In Semitic literature, the second and third sentences often restate the first. And here the second and third sentences say, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for me will save it.” The word life is not the word for physical life. There’s a good Greek word for that: bios, from which we get our word biology. The Greek word that’s translated “life” is psyche, meaning “self.” He’s talking—pretty radically—about the psychological, inner life. “Your old way of having an identity, of gaining a sense of self, has got to end. In a sense you have to die to it. And I can give you a whole new identity. You’ll get a whole new true self.”

Let’s look at this more closely. Verses 24 and 25 show what he’s not saying. He’s not taking the typical Eastern or Western approach to identity. In Buddhism the deepest consciousness of enlightenment is losing all sense that you are an individual self. The boundaries between you and the rest of reality disappear. The Eastern way to humility, to peace, is to actually lose the sense of an individual self.

But Jesus doesn’t stop at, “I want you to lose yourself.” He says, “Lose yourself to find yourself,” which means, “I want you to die to your old approach to identity, and get a new sense of individual self.” He’s not going the Eastern way. But he’s sure not going the Western way either.

W. H. Auden wrote a work called The Age of Anxiety in which he satirizes the modern Western obsession with “finding yourself.” In it there’s a great line that reads: “Miserable wicked me, / How interesting I am.” Others have also noted our obsession with finding and fulfilling your deepest desires as the main thing you’re supposed to do in life. It almost seems that Jesus has us in mind when he says, “You’re never going to find out who you really are by trying to find out who you really are. You’re going to have to lose yourself in serving me.” Some things happen only as a byproduct, and identity is one of them.

“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world?” (9:25). Gaining things from the world is the normal way we try to get
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a self. In fact, the three men at the end of Luke 9 are examples of this. Some people say you’re nobody unless you have a lucrative career. People in more traditional cultures say you’re nobody unless you have a family. But Jesus is saying, “If you get the whole world, it cannot give you a stable self.” He says, “If you lose yourself for me…” In other words, “Instead of trying to gain a self by gaining things, build everything in your life on me, on who I am, on what I have done, then finally you’ll have a true self that is stable, because you were built to know me.”

A disciple is not only someone who has set a new priority, but someone whose entire identity has been reshaped and forged. But how is that possible?

Living a New Mercy

The key to setting a new priority and finding a new identity is in living a new mercy. And this is also evident in Luke 9. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and, it says in verse 52, “He sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him.” They rejected him. “When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’”

Let’s try to understand them. Remember that there was a prophet, named Elijah, who called down fire upon some soldiers who were seeking to arrest him. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus had appeared—to James and John—with Elijah and Moses. The message of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36) was that Jesus was even greater than Moses and Elijah.

So think of the logic of the disciples: You’re greater than Elijah. These people have rejected you, and that’s even worse than rejecting Elijah. That adds even more effrontery to the godhead. Shall we not bring down fire and destroy them?

This is the kind of prophet the world can relate to. But Jesus Christ doesn’t rebuke the unbelieving Samaritans; he rebukes the disciples! He is the absolute un-Elijah. Can you imagine their continued perplexity if he’s greater than Elijah? The soldiers come after Jesus to kill him—in the Garden—and what does he do? He heals an ear that was cut during a skirmish. Later on, the soldiers are pounding nails into his hands, and what does he say? Father, forgive them; they really don’t understand what they’re doing.

Why doesn’t fire come down on the Samaritans? On the soldiers? The answer comes in Luke 12, where Jesus says, “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.” That’s very interesting for two reasons. One is that fire, in biblical imagery, always means the judgment of God. Second, he says he comes to bring fire on the earth! This is perplexing because, after all, he has just rejected Elijah’s fiery approach. Ah! Semitic literature: the second sentence is a restatement of the first; this is what he actually says, in Luke 12:49–50: “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!”

He’s already been baptized with water, so he’s clearly talking about something else. “I’ve come to bring fire. How constrained I am until it’s completed. I have come to undergo a baptism, how crushed I am until it’s over.” Why didn’t the fire come down on the Samaritans or later on the soldiers? Because the fire came down on him. He was baptized. He was the one immersed in the judgment of God. He got what we deserved. This is the answer to all the riddles.

Look back over the years, and you will see that when people want to atone for their sins and be forgiven, they put a sacrifice on the altar and burn it with fire! There’s something inside us that intuitively says, “That can’t be enough to put away sins.” That’s right. All those fires were pointing to this
fire. It didn’t come down on the Samaritans or the soldiers, because it came down on Jesus Christ. He came to take it. He came to bear it. Luke 9:22 says, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected... and on the third day be raised to life.” They rejected him; shouldn’t they be rejected? He’s rejected for them. The Son of Man came to be rejected and to be killed. This is the secret to the change of identity. You have to be melted and amazed and astounded that he took the fire, the punishment, for you. And that’s the key to everything else.

Here’s the reason: You cannot change your identity without a radical experience of mercy! without a radical experience of grace! without a radical experience of love! I’ve heard people say, “You’re right. I probably should change my identity, build my identity on God.”

But you can’t change your identity by just deciding. It’s not an act of the will. A person can’t just say, “You know, I’m having a problem in my life because I built my identity on my parents’ expectations. I think I’ll build my identity on my career and accomplishments.” You can’t do that! That’s not transformation; that’s acting. Your heart is not a computer in which you can just install a program. There’s only one way that the root of your personality can be changed, and that is by an experience of love. Only when your heart experiences love from a new source beyond anything it’s ever known before will your heart start to move toward that source, and begin to be deeply changed.

Thomas Chalmers, the well-known Scottish preacher, in his famous sermon “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection,” says it all: Seldom do any of our habits or flaws disappear by a process of extinction through reasoning or “by the mere force of mental determination.” Reason and willpower are not enough. “But what cannot be destroyed may be dispossessed... The only way to dispossess [the heart] of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.” A young man, for example, may “cease to idolize pleasure, but it is only because the idol of wealth has become the stronger and gotten the ascendancy” and is enabling him to discipline himself for prosperous business. “Even the love of money ceases to have the mastery over the heart” if it’s drawn into another world of ideology and politics, “and he is now lorded over by the love of power.” But “there is not one of these [identity] transformations in which the heart is left without an object. Its desire for one particular object may be conquered, but... its desire for having some one object” of absolute love “is unconquerable.” It is only when admitted “into the number of God’s children through the faith that is in Jesus Christ [that] the spirit of adoption is poured out upon us. It is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominate affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires, in the only way that deliverance is possible.” So it isn’t enough to hold out a “mirror of its imperfections” to your soul. It’s not enough to lecture your conscience. Rather, you must “try every legitimate method of finding access to your hearts for the love of him who is greater than the world.”
Until you’re melted by the amazing sight, knowledge, and sense of Jesus taking the fire for you, you can’t have that transformation of identity. You can’t just decide, “I think I’m going to change my identity.” It can’t be done. It has to be an experience of love.

Jesus is saying that your career can’t buy it for you. Even the best parents can’t give it to you. “Don’t give the title deed of your heart to anyone but me. Don’t have any other master but me, because I’m the only one that will never leave you, and if you fail me, will forgive you.”

So you have to have all three. There must be a living out of this new, radical mercy, which brings you into finding a new identity, which brings you into setting a new priority and thereof the peace.

Being a Disciple

Notice three practical things about being a disciple. First, discipleship is not an option. Jesus says that if anyone would come after me, he must follow me. If you want to come after me—it’s a general term—if you want to have any experience of me, any relationship with me, you have to be a disciple. There are not two kinds of Christians: regular Christians and people who are really disciples. There’s only one: to be a Christian is to be a disciple. To have anything to do with me is to follow me in the way I define it: setting a new priority, finding a new identity, experiencing living out of a new mercy.

Second, having said that it’s not an option—on the other hand, it is a journey. It’s narratively brilliant of Luke to note this. In verse 51 Jesus sets out on a journey toward Jerusalem. It’s Jesus’ journey of discipleship, “He sets his face to go to Jerusalem.” And it’s from the moment he begins his journey toward the cross that he begins all his teaching about discipleship. All the next nine chapters, all the teaching on discipleship, comes as he’s going on a journey. This is Luke’s way of saying that discipleship is a journey. In other words, on the one hand, there is a decisiveness. You have to leave. Have you left? To go on the journey means saying, “I take my hands off my life.” To go on the journey means saying, “I give up my right to self-determination.” To go on the journey means saying, “I will obey you, Lord, and I’ll get rid of all the ifs. Not ‘obey you if,’ but obey. Period. I drop my conditions. I drop the ifs; they’re gone!” Not until you say that have you begun the journey. However, after your decisive beginning, the fact remains that it’s a journey. It’s a process that takes time. You’re not going to have it all together. It’s very important to keep that in mind, because if you think that discipleship is the way you’re saved—that by being committed and focused and giving Jesus the priority you’re going to please God and that will get you saved—you’re missing the point. Look at the order. He doesn’t say, “If you follow me, I’ll go to the cross for you.” He says, “I’m going to the cross for you, so follow me.” You’re not saved because you’re a disciple; you’re a disciple if and only if you understand what he has done to save you.

There is one last thing. The sign of true, growing, gospel disciples is their gentleness. What really amazes me about the heart of this passage is that the disciples say, “We’re going to show you how intensely committed we are to you. Look at those people rejecting you. Don’t you want us to bring fire down on them?!” And what does Jesus say? “Oh, just shut up. You don’t get it.” My experience is that committed disciples of any religion, philosophy, or political cause are hard on themselves and on other people too. They’re committed to the cause, so why aren’t you committed to the cause? You should all be committed to the cause; what’s the matter with you? But the gospel is utterly different. The harder you are on yourself and the gospel, the easier you are on other people. Jesus Christ is saying: My disciples are not terrorists. My disciples know they’re not.
saved by grace, so when they look at people who aren’t doing it right, they don’t say, “Why aren’t you as good as we are? Why aren’t you as committed as we are?” They don’t call fire down from heaven. Jesus says to his disciples: You don’t understand at all. You haven’t had the transformation of identity, because you don’t yet understand my mercy. You don’t know what I’ve done for you, because as yet you can’t, but someday you will. These disciples are probably racist; notice this: they’re calling down fire on the half-breed Samaritans. A lot of Israelites have done a lot of things to reject Jesus, but this is the first time any of his followers wanted fire to come down. There’s racism maybe; there’s self-righteousness definitely! Self-righteousness, bigotry, stridency, harshness—they go away, the more you become a disciple. They go away as your awareness of Jesus taking the fire for you becomes more central in your heart. And that’s a sign that you’re not just trying to save yourself, not just being religious, not just trying to save yourself through your commitment.

Are you becoming more gentle? More tolerant? More gracious with people around you? More kind? Follow Jesus. He’ll give you what you need. He’s a wonderful counselor. One guy comes and says, “I’m ready to follow you wherever you go.” Jesus says, “Go home and think about it.” Another guy says, “I want to go home and think about it.” Jesus says, “Follow me.” What? Because he’s the perfect counselor. All other counseling theories look flat next to his, because he never gives you a template. He gives you exactly what you need. Follow him, and he will give you exactly what you need. He will love you singularly. He will love the real you. He will love you into a whole new identity.

Source: “The Call to Discipleship,” sermon by Tim Keller, given February 9, 2003 at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York. This sermon has been edited for use in written form and is used by permission.

Direct Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

Give up your self, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

C.S. Lewis
possibilities inherent in being Godlike. This clever ploy was aimed at undermining her confidence in the goodness and love of God and arousing the desire to become as God.

The desire to lift up and exalt ourselves beyond our place as God’s creature lies at the heart of pride. As Eve in her now confused and deceived state of mind considered the possibilities, her desire to become Godlike grew stronger. She began to look at the forbidden fruit in a new light, as something attractive to the eyes and pleasant to the touch. Desire increased, giving rise to rationalization and a corresponding erosion of the will to resist and say no.

Finally, weakened by unbelief, enticed by pride, and ensnared by self-deception, she opted for autonomy and disobeyed God’s command. In just a few deft moves, the devil was able to use pride to bring about Eve’s downfall and plunge the human race into spiritual ruin. This ancient but all-too-familiar process confronts each of us daily: “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14–15).

From this point on in the Bible, we see the outworking of pride and unbelief in the affairs of individuals, families, nations, and cultures. As people lose or suppress the knowledge of God, spiritual darkness grows and a psychological inversion occurs: in their thinking God becomes smaller and they become larger. The center of gravity in their mental lives shifts from God to themselves. They become the center of their world, and God is conveniently moved to the periphery, either through denial of his existence or distortion of his character. Self-importance and godless self-confidence grow stronger. The cycle that follows is familiar: people exalt themselves against God and over others. Pride increases, arrogant and/or abusive behavior ensues, and people suffer.

On a national level, this is writ large in the history of Israel and surrounding nations, especially in the indictments delivered by the prophets of the eight and sixth centuries BC. Blinded by power and the unprecedented affluence of the eighth century, prideful leaders in Israel embraced a corrupted view of God, trusted in their own wisdom and power, oppressed their people, ignored his call to repent, and thereby invited his judgment, which fell with disastrous results.

There are also many biblical examples of pride and its consequences in the lives of individuals, and they offer valuable lessons for our own lives. Often their stories are self-contained in one chapter and make for easy reading. One of the more notable examples from the Old Testament is that of Uzziah, who was a believer. When he became king of Judah at age sixteen, he set his heart to seek God and put himself under the spiritual mentorship of Zechariah. And “as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper” (2 Chron. 26:5). As a result, he acquired wealth and also became politically and militarily powerful. Then things changed. “His fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction” (26:15–16).

What happened? There are hints in the text that at some point on the road to the top, he stopped seeking the Lord and the spiritual mentoring of Zechariah. This suggests a lessening dependence on God and a growing reliance upon himself and his
own strength and wisdom. History shows at every point how easy it is for pride to increase as we become stronger, more successful, more prosperous, and more recognized in our endeavors. In fact, anything, real or imagined, that elevates us above others can be a platform for pride. Ironically, this is true even when these things come as a result of God’s blessings.

As a result of all his blessings, Uzziah, rather than humbling himself in thanksgiving to God, began to think more highly of himself than he should have and developed an exaggerated sense of his own importance and abilities. This pride of heart led to presumption before God and brought very serious consequences upon him, illustrating the biblical warnings that pride leads to disgrace (Prov. 11:2) and that “pride goes before destruction” (Prov. 16:18). I encourage you to read and meditate on Uzziah’s full story in 2 Chronicles 26. The stories of Haman (Esther 3–7) and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4) also offer valuable insights into pride and are well worth reading.

This is evident today in the dangerous pride in some political and business leaders in the West. We have only to look around us at the current state of political life in America to see examples. Pride and arrogance are obvious in many political leaders, whether liberal or conservative, making matters much worse than they need to be. Or consider the business and financial catastrophes we have experienced in recent years. A thoughtful article in the Wall Street Journal after the WorldCom and Enron debacles attributed them to “pride, greed and lack of accountability.” The recent financial crisis in America is yet another example of the same thing. Clearly pride is very dangerous and can produce widespread suffering in society when people in leadership and power are corrupted by it.

Pride also affects religious people. Few people today seem to be aware of the danger of spiritual pride, but spiritual leaders throughout the history of the church have always seen it as a great plague and tool of the devil. Even in times of revival, it is a danger. Commenting on the revival in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1737, Jonathan Edwards said:

The first and worst cause of errors that abound in our day and age is spiritual pride. This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of Christ. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit to darken the mind and mislead the judgment. Pride is the main handle by which he has hold of Christian persons and the chief source of all the mischief that he introduces to clog and hinder a work of God. Spiritual pride is the main spring or at least the main support of all other errors. Until this disease is cured, medicines are applied in vain to heal all other diseases.3

An instructive lesson on religious pride from the New Testament is found in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke18:9–14). It is aimed at those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.” It addresses spiritual pride, an especially subtle and dangerous temptation of religious people and leaders, which has been very much in evidence in recent years.

The well-known story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector can help us recognize our own spiritual pride. It tells of a much-
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despised tax collector and a self-righteous Pharisee who went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee proceeds to commend himself to God because of his careful observance of the law and to look down with scornful contempt on the sinful tax collector. “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” Notice in his prayer that his focus is not really on God at all but on how good he is and how bad others are. Here is pride wrapped in the cloak of religion and giving it a bad name. The tax collector is so painfully aware of his sins and unworthiness before God that he cannot even lift his eyes as he stands in the back of the temple, far from the altar. Pounding his breast in sorrowful contrition over his sins, he can manage only the desperate plea, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” In the Greek text, it actually reads “the sinner.” His focus is very much on his own sins, not the sins of others, and especially on his need for God’s mercy. In a surprising reversal of expectation, Jesus says that God answered the tax collector’s prayer, not the Pharisee’s. Then he concludes with his main point: “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Another lesson on religious pride strikes even closer to home for true believers. If we are inclined to say to ourselves, “Lord, I thank you that I am not like that proud Pharisee,” we should bear in mind that the apostles themselves were infected with pride and disputed with one another about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24–27). Sadly self-promotion, in pursuit of reputation, influence, and “success,” is evident in some ministry leaders even today. But if the apostles had to struggle with it, who are we to think ourselves exempt?

It would be easy to conclude that pride is the special problem of those who are rich, powerful, successful, famous, or self-righteous. But that is wrong. It takes many shapes and forms and affects all of us to some degree. The widespread, chronic preoccupation with self in American culture, for example, is rooted in pride and can give rise to or intensify our emotional problems. As a famous Harvard psychologist observed,

Any neurotic is living a life which in some respects is extreme in its self-centeredness… the region of his misery represents a complete preoccupation with himself. The very nature of the neurotic disorder is tied to pride. If the sufferer is hypersensitive, resentful, captious, he may be indicating a fear that he will not appear to advantage in competitive situations where he wants to show his worth. If he is chronically indecisive, he is showing fear that he may do the wrong thing and be discredited. If he is over-scrupulous and self-critical, he may be endeavoring to show how praiseworthy he really is. Thus, most neuroses, are, from the point of view of religion, mixed with the sin of pride.

Much more could be said about pride, but space fails us. Let’s sum up the biblical perspective and move on. Pride can be summarized as an attitude of self-sufficiency, self-importance, and self-exaltation in relation to God. Toward others, it is an attitude of contempt and indifference. As C.S. Lewis observed, “Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense” The depth of pride can vary from one person to the next and can be obvious or concealed. In the Old and New Testaments it is a truism that God will not suffer the creature to exalt itself against the Creator. Pride provokes God’s displeasure, and he has committed himself to oppose it.

If your pride causes you to exalt yourself, you are painting a target on your back.
and inviting God to open fire. And he will. For he has declared his determination to bring it low wherever he finds it, whether among angels or humans, believers or unbelievers. It was pride that caused Lucifer to be cast out of heaven and Adam and Eve to be cast out of Eden. And it is pride that will be our undoing if we tolerate it in our lives. The danger of pride is a sobering reality that each of us needs to ponder. Truly, it is our greatest enemy.

However, chances are good that most of us do not see pride in our lives. For while it is easy to see pride in others, it is very difficult to see it in ourselves. C.S. Lewis observed that “there is no fault which makes a man more unpopular and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.” But he does suggest a couple of ways to detect its presence. First, Lewis quoted William Law from chapter fifteen of A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life “there can be no surer proof of a confirmed pride than a belief that one is sufficiently humble.” Also, “if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask your self, ‘How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronise me, or show off?”’ Because it is so tricky to recognize, we are perhaps best off to earnestly seek God in prayer and ask him to reveal to us any sinful pride in our lives so we can repent and forsake it. Another step we might take is to ask those who live or work with us if they see significant expressions of sinful pride or arrogance in our life.

There is, of course, a good type of pride. Paul, for example, was proud of the churches he had established. But this was not arrogant or self-exalting pride. He made clear that his accomplishments were the fruit of God’s grace to him and through him (Rom. 15:17–19). Occasionally Paul mentions boasting, but this is a matter of highlighting what God has done by his grace, either through Paul or in those in the churches. It is never self-exalting. These days most of us will say that we are proud of our children or our favorite sports team or perhaps something we have accomplished. In cases like this, we are (one hopes) saying that we are really pleased about something good and are not engaging in the sinful type of pride and arrogance the Bible condemns.

Humility

Pride is a universal human problem. Everyone suffers from it to some degree. When we have exalted ourselves in pride, God does not want to punish us and bring us low but rather to forgive and restore us. He says again and again in Scripture, humble yourselves, and I will exalt you. This gives us hope and encouragement. God takes pleasure in our efforts to humble ourselves, and he loves to bless and exalt the humble. For just as pride is the root of all sin, so “humility is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue,” as John Chrysostom once remarked.

Admittedly, humility and the humbling of oneself is out of fashion in today’s world and seems unappealing to most of us. However, as Jonathan Edwards said, “We must view humility as one of the most essential things that characterizes true Christianity.”

God takes pleasure in our efforts to humble ourselves, and he loves to bless and exalt the humble.

Our perspective on humility can be radically changed if we will ponder and meditate on the greatest example of humility in history: Jesus Christ. By the very act of leaving heaven, coming to earth, and taking the form of man, he demonstrated an unfathomable humbling of himself. Throughout his life on earth, Jesus demonstrated a spirit of profound humility, saying that he came “not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). On his last night with the disciples, he took a towel and basin and washed their dirty feet (John 13:1–11), instructing them
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to follow his example of servanthood with one another (John 13:12–17). Andrew Murray captures it well, “Christ is the humility of God embodied in human nature; the Eternal Love humbling itself, clothing itself in the garb of meekness and gentleness, to win and serve and save us.”

The apostle Paul may well have been thinking of this very scene in the Upper Room when he urged the believers in Philippi:

Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:5–8).

Paul is here encouraging ordinary believers in a local church, who apparently have some measure of sinful pride in their hearts and relationships, to reflect on and adopt the attitude and actions of Jesus their Lord and follow his example of humility.

The consequences of such an attitude may give us pause. Humbling ourselves could be costly in the workplace, in the community, or in other ways. However, that is a shortsighted, worldly perspective. For the passage continues:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9–11).

In Jesus we have the “example of all examples”: those who humble themselves will be exalted! And this is meant to guide our lives in this world. If we will take care of humbling ourselves, we can trust God to take care of exalting us.

How do we gain the mind of Christ and humble ourselves? To put on the mind of Christ, we will need to make a firm decision to ponder, understand, and adopt Jesus’ way of thinking; his values and attitudes must become ours. His strong emphasis on humility and meekness and his example of it must take hold of our thinking, our desires and our conduct. We must admire his humility and want it for ourselves. For this to happen, we need to earnestly and regularly pray for the Holy Spirit to change our hearts, for it is impossible to do it in our own strength. We will also need to understand what Jesus meant when he called men and women to humble themselves. We discover that from the Greek word Jesus and the apostles used, *tapeinos*, which conveys the idea of having a right view of ourselves before God and others. If pride is an exalted sense of who we are in relation to God and others, humility is having a realistic sense of who we are before God and others. We must not think too highly (or too lowly) of ourselves. Rather, we must be honest and realistic about who and what we are.

This lies behind Paul’s thinking when he tells the Romans, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment” (Rom. 12:3). He then proceeds to instruct the believers in how to use the spiritual gifts
God has imparted to them to serve one another (Rom. 12:4–8). In other words, humility is having a right view of ourselves in relation to God and others and acting accordingly.

What is a right view of ourselves? Specifics will vary from person to person, but certain things are common to us all. We are God’s creatures: small, finite, dependent, limited in intelligence and ability, prone to sin, and soon to die and face God’s judgment (Heb. 9:27). But we are also God’s children: created, loved, and redeemed by God’s grace alone, not by anything in or of ourselves; and gifted by God with certain unique gifts, abilities, resources, and advantages, which are to be used for his glory. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Frequently reminding ourselves of these things is important.

Having a right view of God and ourselves has a profound effect on our relationships with others. As Paul goes on to say in Romans, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.” (Rom. 12:16). And as he said to the Philippians, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3–4). As we refuse to be preoccupied with ourselves and our own importance and seek to love and serve others, it will reorient us from self-centeredness to other-centeredness—to serving and caring for others just as Jesus did for us. In the narcissistic culture of contemporary America, this is a particularly powerful countercultural witness of Christ’s presence and lordship in our lives.

Truly, humility is our greatest friend. It increases our hunger for God’s word and opens our hearts to his Spirit. It leads to intimacy with God, who knows the proud from afar, but dwells with him “who is of a contrite and lowly spirit” (Isa. 57:15). It imparts the aroma of Christ to all whom we encounter. It is a sign of greatness in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:24–27).

Developing the identity, attitude, and conduct of a humble servant does not happen over night. It is rather like peeling an onion: you cut away one layer only to find another beneath it. But it does happen. As we forsake pride and seek to humble ourselves by daily deliberate choices in dependence on the Holy Spirit, humility grows in our souls. Fenelon said it well, “Humility is not a grace that can be acquired in a few months: it is the work of a lifetime.” And it is a grace that is precious in the sight of God, who in due course will exalt all who embrace it.

Notes

2. See Augustine, The City of God 14.13; Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, ques. 84.
5. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 112.
7. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 110.

“They that know God will be humble; they that know themselves cannot be proud.”

John Flavel
burly first sergeant commanded Edman to lead a detail of five men to another company miles away. As the rest of the men assigned to this march prepared their belongings, Edman slipped in to an empty room that the Russians had used as a tavern. There he knelt in front of a bench and cried out to God, “Lord, I cannot go, I am so ill, so worn, with such a sore throat and fever that I cannot go. And I do not know how far C Company may be stationed!”

At that moment, for the first time in his life, Edman became aware of a “Presence” beside him. He knew immediately that it was Jesus. He couldn’t see or touch him, but he heard Jesus say, “I will go with you.” He arose from that encounter with the living Christ with a renewed strength and peace. He then led his group through the deep snow and trudged throughout the afternoon, eventually arriving at a home in Boden—C Company headquarters. The woman of the house, noticing that Ray was not well, gave him a hot meal and a warm feather bed in the attic with her brother rather than bunking him in the unheated room with the other soldiers. This experience of the Spirit’s presence had a profound effect on the young Edman as he was learning to trust the Lord in the midst of difficulties.

Edman’s Education and Mentor

After his military service, Edman spent two years at the University of Illinois, where he studied French and Spanish. He already spoke Swedish, German, and English. During a Bible conference between his freshman and sophomore years, through the influence of Paul Rader, the pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, Edman dedicated himself to missionary service in South America.

When Rader became the president of the Missionary Training Institute in Nyack, New York, Edman decided to take a one-year break from his studies at Illinois and teach Spanish and take courses at Nyack. During this time Edman met “Uncle Joe” and his own future wife, Edith Olson, on a trip to Boston.

Uncle Joe saw great potential in Ray, and out of that developed a lifelong Paul–Timothy-type relationship. Sensing that Ray was somewhat restless, Uncle Joe invited him to move to Boston and live with him as he explored what God had in store. On one eventful night, the mentor told his young disciple, “Ray, God has a plan for your life. When you abandon yourself, God will reveal it.” Almost immediately, Ray fell on his knees and prayed that he would “abandon himself to God and await his will.” He realized that his love for adventure and “busy holiness” had hindered him from discerning God’s direction in his life.

For the next two years, as Edman completed a bachelor’s degree in Spanish at Boston University, his relationship with Edith grew. Soon after his graduation, Edman traveled to Ecuador for mission work, with the plan that Edith would soon join him.

Anywhere, Lord?

Ray and Edith loved their mission work in Ecuador. They were able to start a small Bible school, and in five years of marriage they were blessed with two sons, Charles and Roland. They had witnessed firsthand the miraculous life-giving power of God as Ray walked through the valley of the shadow of death. And yet the aftereffects of the typhus and life in the tropics took their toll on Ray’s body. In an effort to regain
his health, Edman traveled with his three-year-old son, Charles, to the United States to see if a change in climate would help him physically. Edith and their one-year-old son, Roland, stayed behind in Ecuador awaiting their return. On this sea voyage, Edman came upon Moffatt’s translation of 2 Corinthians 2:14, “Wherever I go, thank God, he makes my life a constant pageant of triumph in Christ.” In his physical weakness, Edman felt nothing like a “pageant of triumph in Christ.” So he prayed, “Dear Lord, be pleased to make my life that constant pageant of triumph, always to be led in triumph in Thee!”

He was startled by the answer to this prayer, as he heard the Holy Spirit say, “Are you willing to go anywhere for Me?”

“Anywhere? Yes, Lord, anywhere in Ecuador Thou mayest say.”

“I did not say ‘in Ecuador,’” was the reply.

After a time, Edman recalls quietly, with sincerity of heart, replying, “Yes, Lord, anywhere Thou sayest I will go, only that my life may be a constant pageant of triumph in Thee.”

Edman wrote later, “Death to my own plans and desires was almost deliriously delightful. Everything was laid at His nail-scarred feet, life or death, health or illness, appreciation by others or misunderstanding, success or failure as measured by human standards. Only He Himself mattered.”

Fourth President of Wheaton College

Following his abandonment to God’s will for his life and willingness to go anywhere, Edman became the pastor of a small church in Worcester, Massachusetts. While serving there he completed a PhD program in international relations at Clark University and began hosting a morning radio program on WORC.

While praying one cold morning in January 1936, Edman heard the Lord say, “Wheaton College.” That seemed strange. The idea of teaching at Wheaton had never crossed his mind. Yet two months later, this word from the Lord was confirmed when Edman was invited to join the faculty of Wheaton College, in Illinois. Teaching history, Edman soon became one of the most popular professors on campus. He also gained respect among the faculty for his sharp mind, clear thoughts on education, and ability to communicate well in public settings. So in January 1940, when the board of trustees came to a point of irreconcilable differences with the college’s president, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., the name of V. Ray-
Profile in Faith: V. Raymond Edman

V. Raymond Edman was proposed as an “acting president.” Thus began Edman’s twenty-five years of service to Wheaton College and to the greater Christian community as the institution’s president. During his tenure, the college expanded its financial endowments, its enrollment rose by 50 percent, and the campus added fourteen buildings. He established the Office of Chaplain, witnessed a campus revival in 1950, and had a lasting impact on the lives of faculty, staff, and students such as Billy Graham.

When Graham found himself in the midst of controversy, Edman stayed by his side and encouraged him with the words, “Billy, pay no attention. You have only one Person to please, and that’s the Lord.”

Mentor to Billy Graham

Soon after Edman became president of Wheaton College, his mother and brother happened to hear a young preacher by the name of Billy Graham while they were vacationing in Florida. They encouraged Graham to go to Wheaton College to get further training. He accepted their counsel and enrolled at Wheaton in the fall of 1940. Graham writes in his autobiography, “Prexy Edman won my heart at once. Crossing campus one of my first days there, I was greeted by a person I did not recognize. ‘Hi, Bill!’ he said. I found out the next day he was president of the college.”11 Billy couldn’t get over the fact that though he’d never met the man, Edman already knew his name! Their second meeting took place at a prayer meeting when Dr. Edman told Billy that he’d heard good things about him from his mom and brother and that if he needed anything not to hesitate to contact him. Graham would write,

I never dreamed this was the beginning of one of the warmest, most enduring and important friendships of my entire life. Here was a man deep in the things of God, his life saturated with Scripture and prayer. Here was a man of courage and integrity—but most of all compassion… He was a marvelous listener. His counseling and his prayers were usually brief but to the point.12

Just as young Edman had once been mentored, encouraged, challenged, and held up in prayer throughout his life by his mentor in the faith, Uncle Joe, so Edman became that kind of spiritual father and friend to Billy Graham.

Dr. Edman would have a lifelong impact on Graham’s life and ministry. Prexy encouraged Billy’s budding relationship with Ruth, commenting one day, “Bill, Ruth’s one in a million.” He also recommended that Billy succeed him as a preaching pastor at the local Tabernacle Church, while Graham was still a student. To make Billy’s preaching assignment easier, Edman would provide him with sermon outlines that he could adapt since he knew Billy had a full academic load and didn’t have time to prepare.

In the years to come, whenever Billy had a major decision to make, he would call Prexy. Edman would give no direct advice but would tell Billy, “Do what the Lord tells you to do.” Then they would pray about it. When Graham found himself in the midst of controversy, Edman stayed by his side and encouraged him with the words, “Billy, pay no attention. You have only one Person to please, and that’s the Lord.” Edman became one of the charter board members of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and brought wisdom and good counsel to the board. Edman always adjourned the board meetings early saying with a smile, “You cannot accomplish anything after nine o’clock.” That was in part because he was an early riser who met the Lord in prayer in the wee hours of the morning.
Billy Graham has noted that as he traveled the world he would meet people who told him how they had been positively influenced by Raymond Edman. He writes, “We will never know the full evaluation of his life and ministry until we stand at the judgment seat of Christ, but still I have to say that he was the most unforgettable Christian I ever met.”

In the Presence of the King

In 1965 Dr. Edman passed the baton of the Wheaton presidency to his former Wheaton student, now proven leader, who was also a friend of Uncle Joe: Hudson T. Armerding. Edman was promoted to the position of chancellor so that he could continue to represent Wheaton, albeit with a lighter load. He was also elected as the senior vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

On September 22, 1967, Chancellor Edman stood before the Wheaton College faculty and students to give a chapel message titled “In the Presence of the King.” The 1960s were turbulent times, as the Vietnam War raged. Students on the Wheaton campus were struggling with how to make sense of it all. Edman knew that what Christians in Wheaton and elsewhere needed was a return to seeking a daily audience with the King of kings.

In Edman’s commitment to follow God anywhere, he had developed relationships with world leaders such as Madame Chiang Kai-shek, President Richard Nixon, and His Majesty Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. He began his chapel message by telling of an invitation he received to enter the throne room of King Selassie. He described the protocol and respect required to enter into the king’s presence. Then Edman stated,

But I speak primarily of another King. This chapel is the house of the King. Chapel is designed to be a meeting on your part with the King of kings and the Lord of lords Himself. To that end, chapel is designed for the purpose of worship... not a lecture, not an entertainment, but a time of meeting the King. Coming in, sit down and wait in silence before the Lord. In so doing, you will prepare your own hearts to hear the Lord, to meet with the King. Your heart will learn to cultivate what the Scripture says, “Be still and know that I am God.” Over these years I have learned the immense value of that deep, inner silence as David, the king, sat in God’s presence to hear from him.

Those were V. Raymond Edman’s last words on earth as he turned, collapsed on stage and entered the presence of the King of kings whom he had served so long and well.

“We will never know the full evaluation of his life and ministry until we stand at the judgment seat of Christ, but still I have to say that he was the most unforgettable Christian I ever met.”

Conclusion

Dr. V. Raymond Edman, husband, father, friend, soldier, missionary, pastor, professor, mentor, devotional writer, college president and chancellor, was first and foremost a disciple of Jesus Christ. In his book They Found the Secret, Edman noticed a common pattern that is lived out by mature disciples of Jesus:

The pattern seems to be self-centeredness, self-effort, increasing dissatisfaction and outer discouragement, a temptation to give it all up because there is no better way, and then finding the Spirit of God to be their strength, their guide, their confidence and companion—in a word, their life. The crisis of the deeper life is the key that unlocks...
Profile in Faith: V. Raymond Edman

the secret of their transformation. It is the beginning of the exchanged life. What is the exchanged life? Really it is not some thing; it is some One. It is the indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ made real and rewarding by the Holy Spirit.15

Victor Raymond Edman found the secret. And so can we.

Notes

3. Edman, They Found the Secret, 179.
4. Cairns, V. Raymond Edman, 52.
5. Edman, They Found the Secret, 180.
6. Quoted in Edman, They Found the Secret, 8–9.
7. Cairns, V. Raymond Edman, 18.
8. Edman, They Found the Secret, 177.
9. Cairns, V. Raymond Edman, 3.3.
10. Edman, They Found the Secret, 182.
12. Quoted in Edman, They Found the Secret, 5–6.
13. Quoted in Edman, They Found the Secret, 8.
15. Quoted in Edman, They Found the Secret, 12.

Ours is an undisciplined age. The old disciplines are breaking down, and the foundations of society appear to be crumbling. The discipline of the home seems to be vanishing in the new psychology which teaches: parents obey your children! The discipline of the schoolroom is becoming anathema, according to the so-called Progressive Education, lest the personality of the child be thwarted by the imposition of a will higher than his own. The old academic “disciplines”: mathematics, ancient language, grammar, are being ignored as obsolete and unimportant. Above all, the discipline of divine grace is derided as legalism or is entirely unknown to a generation that is largely illiterate in the Scriptures. We need the rugged strength of Christian character that can come only from discipline: the discipline of spirit, of mind, of body, of society.16

V. Raymond Edman
Significantly at this point, Whitefield encourages the use of imagination as we read the Bible. He declares, “Fancy yourselves… To be with Mary sitting at the feet of the holy Jesus; and be willing to learn what God shall teach you, as Samuel was, when he said, ‘Speak Lord for thy servant heareth’” (381). For developing imagination, our best teachers are children. Their eagerness to listen and learn is a critical quality as we approach the Word with a desire to grow as Jesus’ disciples. Further, the purpose of this sanctified imagination is to personalize our reading. The passages we read were intended not only for people in earlier generations; they were written to us today.

Third, we must approach our reading of Scripture with sincerity. Whitefield declares the importance of motivation; unless we “desire to do the will of God” (382), our reading is likely to be skewed and of limited lasting value. Reading that is motivated merely to attack others or justify a specific position, without any desire to know God more personally by applying the passage to one’s own life, is unlikely to yield the proper fruit regardless of how intense a person reads. Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705), a leader of early Lutheran pietism who also emphasized the importance of laypeople searching the Scriptures, similarly commends sincerity: “The mind of the person who wishes to read in a fruitful manner must stand in true repentance, have in particular a heartfelt desire to truly know the divine will, and out of such a desire direct its reading.”

Fourth, Whitefield stresses that to read Scripture effectively one must “make an application of every thing you read to your own hearts” (382). He reminds us that everything recorded in the Bible “was written for our learning” (382). By its very nature Scripture is formative and transformative if we take the message seriously and apply it to our lives. At this point Whitefield notes the importance of experience. This was a characteristic of the early evangelicals, which they had inherited from the Puritans of the previous century. Then referred to as experimental divinity, heart religion, or experimental piety, today we would call it experiential learning. Regardless of the terminology, the point is that we are reading something not merely for information, but to be formed and transformed by it. In other words, we recognize the reality that Scripture is the living Word of God and will accomplish all that God intends for it (Isa. 55:11). Here Whitefield stresses the role of the Holy Spirit, who was foundational in a person’s experience of God. While not specifically referenced in this sermon, there is a clear allusion to John 16:13, that “when the
“Inflaming Your Souls by the Word of God”

Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.” With the emphasis on experience, this application is specific, particular, and deeply personal.

Fifth, and directly expanding upon his last principle, Whitefield urges us to “[l]abour to attain that Spirit by which they [i.e. the Scriptures] were written” (383). He illustrates this principle by reminding us that Nicodemus’ ignorance of Jesus (John 3:1–21) was due to his lack of awareness of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Spirit and Word has had a long association in the church, but this teaching was emphasized in the Protestant Reformation with John Calvin and then the Puritans. Whitefield was often accused of enthusiasm, which was not a healthy label in the eighteenth century. It was frequently associated with the more unbalanced extremes of ecstatic religious experience. In light of that criticism, he articulates the dynamic interaction between the Word and Spirit:

Though it is the quintessence of Enthusiasm to pretend to be guided by the Spirit without the written Word, yet it is every Christian’s bounden duty to be guided by the Spirit in conjunction with the written Word of God. Watch, therefore, I pray you, O believers, the motions of God’s blessed Spirit in your souls, and always try the suggestions or impressions that you may at any time feel, by the unerring rule of God’s most Holy Word.9

The interaction of the Word and Spirit creates the possibility for healthy experiences of God. Our contemporary culture seems overly consumed by experience, with little sensitivity to an important factor: discerning an experience’s validity. But the objective Word of God guided by the subjective presence and power of the Holy Spirit can produce significant experiences that deepen and guide us as disciples following Jesus.

Whitefield also recognizes that there are multiple levels of meaning in Scripture. This is again an ancient principle extending back to the Old Testament. Whitefield acknowledges there can be literal and spiritual meanings of a passage. The contemporary church, perhaps especially some evangelicals, is reticent to acknowledge this approach. Devout evangelical Christians of the eighteenth century would first read the Bible in a literal and historical sense. They typically followed this with a typological or spiritual reading, reflective of the christological emphasis previously mentioned. This spiritual reading of Scripture was still strongly present in the preaching and teaching of Charles Spurgeon in the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note the parallels between these early evangelicals and the growing popularity of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture among some evangelical theologians today.9 Whitefield was not naïve to the potential for misuse or possibility of overemphasizing spiritual reading; Scripture should always be used as a guide for accurate interpretation of reading and preaching the Bible.

This fifth point and the previous section on application and experience are the two longest topics of this sermon. Significantly, the Holy Spirit occupies the primary role in both principles. Whitefield concludes this topic by arguing from common sense for cultivating a dynamic dependency upon the Spirit’s interaction with the Word:
How should it be otherwise, for God being a Spirit, he cannot communicate himself any otherwise than in a spiritual manner to the hearts of men; and consequently if we are strangers to his Spirit, we must continue strangers to his word, because it is altogether like himself, spiritual. Labour, therefore, earnestly for to attain this blessed Spirit: otherwise your understanding will never be opened to understand the scriptures aright (384).

Sixth, pray and ask God to send the Spirit to guide your reading of Scripture. While this might sound similar to the fifth point, Whitefield here expands discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke to his disciples about this principle in the Upper Room: that the Spirit of truth (John 16:13) would guide them into all truth. Whitefield’s concern here is that we read the words of Scripture not only at a surface level, but more deeply that “they might be inwardly ingrafted into our hearts” (384). Prayer is an essential guiding resource in this regard. Whitefield encourages us to frequently intersperse our reading with short prayers to the Holy Spirit over every word of the text.

Seventh, Whitefield concludes with the reminder that searching the Scriptures must be done continually. It is not an isolated practice that we do when we are in trouble but rather a habit that continually refreshes our lives. He suggests that the imagery of searching the Scripture parallels the intentionality and intensity of a person digging for a precious treasure. Once we discover something of value and truly grasp its worth, we will not treat it casually. What is more precious for Christians who seek to follow Jesus than saturating their hearts and minds in God’s revelation?

Therefore Whitefield appropriately challenges us to read the Bible both “devoutly [and] daily” (384). The introductory words of this article, which note the necessity of continuing in Christ’s words, connect nicely with this final principle. Following Jesus as his disciple is a lifelong adventure. We never outgrow our need for searching the Scriptures or inviting the Word to dwell within us fully.

Throughout this sermon, Whitefield’s attention to and dependency on the Holy Spirit is evident. But our preacher is realistic and recognizes the broad spectrum of his audience. Some listeners, no doubt, are committed to searching the Scriptures with great delight and desire to know and serve God more fully; others treat the Bible more superficially and read a verse or two if there are no other pressing demands on their time; still others may occasionally open the Bible and search for an answer when in crisis. So Whitefield concludes his sermon by reminding his listeners not to grieve
or quench the Holy Spirit by despising or ignoring Scripture. Rather, he asserts that “unless corrected by the Spirit and word of God, you shall not enter into his heavenly kingdom: for unless you delight in God here, how will you be made meet [i.e. fitting] to dwell with him hereafter” (385).

It is important to realize that Whitefield is not offering us a specific method or technique of how to study the Bible. Rather, his focus is on the proper attitude and approach that we should have as we search the Scriptures. These principles are transferable whether we read the Bible using the inductive study method, the manuscript method, the practice of precept upon precept, or lectio divina. His basic concern is that we read the Bible in such a way that the liberating truth of Scripture can penetrate into our lives and address both our heads and hearts.

Eugene Peterson communicates this same message with equal passion. His provocative work Eat This Book has the inviting subtitle, A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading. Peterson’s central conviction is that Scripture must be read in a participatory manner. He maintains: “The word of God is a dialogical word, a word that invites participation. Prayer is our participation in the creation, salvation, and community that God reveals to us in Holy Scripture.”

Earlier in the book he expands this theme in a way that Whitefield would strongly affirm. Peterson writes:

“This may be the single most important thing to know as we come to read and study and believe these Holy Scriptures: this rich, alive, personally revealing God as experienced in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, personally addressing us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, at whatever age we are in, in whatever state we are—me, you, us. Christian reading is participatory reading, receiving the words in such a way that they become interior to our lives, the rhythms and images becoming practices of prayer, acts of obedience, ways of love.”

Clearly Whitefield and Peterson share the same agenda in this regard. If we are serious about being Christ’s disciples, we must read the Bible in such a way that we are renewed and transformed by it. This comes by reading it as if we were engaging in conversation with the characters of the various stories under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

It is appropriate for George Whitefield to have the final word as he integrates these various strands:

Do this, and you will, with a holy violence [i.e. intensity], draw down God’s holy Spirit into your hearts; you will experience his gracious influence, and feel him enlightening, quickening, and inflaming your souls by the word of God; you will then not only read, but mark, learn, and inwardly digest what you read: and the word of God will be meat [i.e. nourishment] indeed (384).

Significantly, Whitefield emphasizes the operation of the Holy Spirit to enlighten, quicken, and inflame one’s soul with the Word of God. The desired end is not only to read for information but to “inwardly digest,” a phrase Whitefield borrowed from The Book of Common Prayer that vividly depicts the formative nature of the Word of God. Whitefield’s practice echoes the admo-
nition of Colossians 3:16, that the Word of
God dwell within one’s heart, and it smartly
summarizes Jesus’ call for all who would
follow him to continue in his word, that we
might truly be his disciples.

Notes

1. All quotations from the Bible are taken from
the New Revised Standard Version. The KJV, NASB,
NCV, and Holman Christian Standard Bible all ren-
der the word “continue.” The ESV and NKJV trans-
late “continue” as “abide,” and the NIV and TNIV
use “hold to.” While linguistically these words are
part of the semantic range of meaning, the Greek
tense appears to favor the word “continue”; this
expresses the active and ongoing responsibility of
dwelling in the Word.

2. For a helpful introduction to the life and min-
istry of George Whitefield, see Timothy Larsen, ed.
Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals (Downers
Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 716–19. See also
Frank Lambert, Pedlar of Divinity: George Whitefield
and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737–1770 (Princeton,
NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Michael A.G.
Haykin, The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George
Whitefield (Dundas, ON, Canada: Joshua Press, 2000),
esp. 21–77.


the Scriptures,” Sermons on Important Topics, new ed.
(London: William Baynes and Son, 1825), 378–85. All
references to this sermon will be placed within the
text according to page numbers of this edition.


Fathers, rev ed. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publica-
tions, 1984), 233 (no. 11).

7. Philip Jacob Spener, “The Necessary and Useful
Reading of the Holy Scriptures,” in Pietists: Selected
Writings, ed. Peter C. Erb (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press,
1983), 73.

8. George Whitefield, Six Sermons, 3rd ed. (Lon-
don, 1750), 92, cited in Iain H. Murray,
Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth
Trust, 1987), 248.

9. For a very helpful introduction to this as well as
an annotated bibliography of the major sources, see
J. Todd Billings, “How to Read the Bible,” Christianity

10. Eugene H. Peterson, Eat This Book: A Conversa-
tion in the Art of Spiritual Reading (Grand Rapids:

11. Peterson, Eat This Book, 28.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our
learning: Grant us to hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest
them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of
everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who
lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and
ever. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer
Obedience: 
The Key That Opens All Doors

by Thomas A. Tarrants, III, D.Min.
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Obedience is not a positive word these days. For some it seems cold and harsh. For others it carries overtones of legalism in religion or control in other venues. Perhaps for all of us it challenges our inherent drive toward autonomy and the individualistic bent that pervades our culture. As Americans we do not want anyone telling us what to do—not even God.

But how many of us have stopped to think that our wariness of obedience may be keeping us from one of the great keys to the enjoyment of God and the transformation of our lives? Are we aware that the Bible and the saints throughout history affirm the insight of John Calvin that “all true knowledge of God is born out of obedience”?

The High Cost of Disobedience

It takes only a moment’s reflection to realize that the cost of disobedience has been high. The world as we know it is not the good world God originally created, nor do we human beings much resemble the image of God in which we were first made. Tragically that image has been shattered, and the world is filled with sin, sorrow, and suffering. The “break” began with one act of disobedience by our first parents. By a deliberate choice, rooted in pride and unbelief, they acted in defiance of God’s revealed will. And their self-centered drive for autonomy has passed down to every human being. Perhaps Woody Allen spoke for us all when he famously said, “The heart wants what it wants.”

With our own hands, we forged the chains that bind us, and we now lack the power to free ourselves from them. We want to do what we want to do and cannot escape. Our only hope lies outside ourselves, in the One who loves us and gave himself up for us.

The Blessings of Obedience

When we grasp an understanding of the blessings of obedience, we find them utterly astounding. Because of his great love, God has made a way for us to be reconciled to him and freed from our bondage to sin and self. Our predicament can be reversed if we will forsake our rebellion and return to him. And this is now possible because God has sent his only Son to rescue us. Jesus came to earth and lived a life of perfect submission and obedience to the Father’s will. The supreme expression of his obedience was submitting to the shameful, humiliating, and excruciating death of crucifixion, which was also the supreme expression of his love for the Father (John 14:31). In this act of self-sacrificing love, he “who knew no sin” became sin for us “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). His perfect obedience to God’s law as God’s loving and faithful Son can now be imputed to us, and our disobedience can be laid upon him, setting us right with God, if we choose it.

Our freedom begins when we respond to the love of God as it meets us in Jesus’ call to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). In Greek, these two verbs are in the imperative mood and thus are commands to be obeyed. They summon us to turn from the disobedience of unbelief to the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5). And the gift of faith

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makes this possible for us. Confident trust in Jesus and his message gives us life, turns us around, frees us, and sets in motion a great reversal in our lives.

This transforming reversal progresses as we follow Jesus Christ, who says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Following Jesus means taking steps forward in what might be called “the obedience of faith”—moving steadily away from our former areas of disobedience and back into the will of God. The power to do this comes from the Holy Spirit, whose work it is to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:13, 29). Though there will be times when we disobey, there is forgiveness as we repent and return to the Lord. This process of discipleship or sanctification, which restores the image of God in us, takes a lifetime and is completed only in the world to come. But we can make great progress in this world, which should be our highest priority.

**The Key to Obedience**

C.S. Lewis said, “Obedience is the key that opens every door.” But how do we obey without falling into legalism? Through love. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Just as Jesus’ love for the Father was expressed in his obedience, so our love for Jesus is expressed in our obedience (John 14:31; 15:9-10). Ours is not the obedience of one who seeks to justify himself before God but the obedience of one who, in grateful love, seeks to please him “who loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph. 5:2; Gal. 2:20). Thus we may speak of “the obedience of love.” As with faith, the source of this love is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Sonship, who draws us to the Father’s love. And Jesus has promised his help: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16). To the one who, by the Spirit, embraces the obedience of love, Jesus goes on to say, “I will love him and manifest myself to him” (14:21), and, “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (14:23). Thus, as John Stott once said, “the test of love is obedience and the reward of love is the self-manifestation of Christ.” This promise of personal intimacy with the Father and the Son enabled by the Spirit takes us to the very heart of the trinitarian life, a life of grace that is free from law. A life in which we joyfully will to do the will of God and to please him in all things.

This is the heritage of all who have come to a living faith in Jesus Christ. If we would enjoy the fullness of this life, let us embrace the obedience of faith and love and daily seek to walk by the Holy Spirit, through whom all these blessings come (Gal. 5:16–25). And in prayerful meditation upon Jesus’ words, let us ask the Spirit to teach us and transform us more and more into his image.
In partnership with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, on October 20 we concluded a three-day, nine-event Relevant Hope outreach in Washington, DC. The grand finale filled Constitution Hall with 3400 to hear Ravi and Michael Ramsden speak on Christianity: A Failed Hope?

**OTHER EVENTS INCLUDED:**

University students at:
Georgetown University,
American University,
George Washington
University

Capitol Hill staffs
Business people at two venues
Professors from local universities
Ministry leaders from across the metropolitan area

The goal of these events was to help the believer think, and the thinker believe. Skeptics, seekers and non-believers were encouraged to attend and to participate in open-forum Q&A sessions.

A companion website has been developed as part of the Relevant Hope City Mission Project to help people who are examining what they believe to find answers as they search for truth.