



**Luke 6:39-49**  
**“How A Jesus-Follower Endures”**

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**“Following Christ from City Center”**

## "HOW A JESUS-FOLLOWER ENDURES"

Question = What Followers Make Good Disciples?

<b>SIGHT</b>		<b>1) vv.39-42 A DISCIPLE LEADS THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP AND SELF-EXAMINATION.</b>	
		//15:3, Single Parable → Multiple Parables = Thematic Unity	
		<b>a) v.39 Double Question On Leadership And Sight (Mt. 15:14, Rom. 2:19).</b>	
		Church Needs:	
39		He (i.e. Jesus) also told them a parable:	Comparison <b>Church Needs Leaders Who See Before They Lead (1)</b>
1		Can a blind man <i>lead</i> a blind man? (No)	Scribes Are Blind To Jesus, Ignorance Multiplied! Danger!
2		Will they not both <b>FALL</b> into a pit? (Yes)	Double Meaning? Sheol, 17:1, 13, Rhetorical Questions
		<b>Church Needs Leaders Who Are First Apprenticed (2)</b>	
		<b>b) v.40 Answer: You Must First Be Taught To See To Lead Others (Mt. 10:24-25).</b>	
40		A disciple	Proverb, 3 Levels: (1) Disciple in training ( <i>mathetes</i> )
		is not above his teacher,	Following Jesus Is The Path To Sight/Insight
		but everyone when he is fully taught	Possible? (2) Graduate "fully taught = restored" ( <i>katerismenos</i> )
		will be like his teacher.	Sight = Conformity To Jesus, (3) Teach Others ( <i>didaskalos</i> )
		Students Might Exceed Their Rabbi, But Not Jesus!	
		<b>a') vv.41-42a Double Question On Mutual Correction And Sight (Mt. 7:1-5, Gal. 6:1-5).</b>	
41	1	Why do you see the speck that is in your <i>brother's</i> eye,	<b>Church Needs Correction, Self-Examination (3)</b>
		but do not notice the beam that is in your own eye?	Lev. 19, Apply To Self! Hyperbole/Humor
42	2	Or how can you say, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,'	Community, Moral Watchdogs
		when you yourself do not see the beam that is in your own eye?	Ask God To Show Blind Spots
		Insight/Humility Before Teaching, James 3:1	
		<b>b') v.42b Answer: Self-Examination Comes First, Only Then Correction: Gnostic.</b>	
		You hypocrite, <i>first</i> take the beam out of your own eye,	Epithet, Inauthentic/ Play Actor
		and <i>then</i> you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your <i>brother's</i> eye.	When See, Then Aid Others

Relation To Others (6:27-38), Relation To Self (6:39-49)

<b>HEART</b>		<b>2) 6:43-45 A DISCIPLE BEARS GOOD FRUIT FROM THE HEART (THE DEEPEST SELF).</b>	
		Some Are Blind, Evil Fruit, <i>Impossibilia</i>	
<b>Image</b>		<b>a) vv.43-44 Three Natural Observations (Mt. 7:16-21).</b>	
		<b>Church Needs Discernment (4)</b>	
43	1	"For no good tree bears bad (i.e. inedible, useless) fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit;	X
44	2	for each tree is known by its own fruit.	3:7-14, a) Long Term Reveals Root
	3	For figs are not gathered from thorns, nor grapes picked from a bramble bush.	Do I Nourish? 2 (-)B
		Bi-Polar: 2 Kinds Of People, No Hiding	
<b>People</b>		<b>b) v.45 Three Parallel Anthropological Observations (Mt. 12:33-35, James 3:1-18).</b>	
45	1	The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and	Listen To Myself
	2	the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart produces evil;	Reproduce Our Identity, Hearts
	3	for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.	Maxim b) Speech Reveals Being
		Jesus Gives New Heart! Note How People Live/Speak	

<b>STRENGTH</b>		<b>1') 6:46-49 A DISCIPLE BUILDS TO ENDURE THRU OBEDIENCE (Mt. 7:21, James 1:21-25).</b>	
		End Of Sermon: Exhortation (Peroration)	
		<b>a) v.46 Challenging Question (5:1-11, Mt. 7:21, James 1:14-26).</b>	
		8:21,11:28, Possible Disconnect	
46		But why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I tell you?	More Than Confession, Contradiction
		<b>Churches Need To Close The Obedience Gap (5)</b>	
		<b>b) vv.47-48 Positive Example: Ones Who Comes/Hears/Obeys = Endurance (Mt. 7:24-27).</b>	
47		Every one who <i>comes to me</i> and <i>hears</i> my words and <i>does</i> them, I will show you what he is like:	3 Stages:(1) Come
48	1	he is like a man building a house,/ who dug deep, and laid the foundation upon rock;	(2) Hear
	2	and when the flood arose,	Calamities Are Not Scheduled! (3) Do
	2'	the stream broke against that house,	Ps. 1, Stable In Times Of Crisis
	1'	and could not shake it,/ because it had been well built.	<b>Church Needs Foundation, Endurance (6)</b>
		Come To Me (6:18), Final Contrast Parallels Beatitudes/Woes	
		<b>c) v.49 Negative Example: One Who Hears And Does Not Do = Disaster Because Shallow.</b>	
49		But he who hears and does not do them	Action On Truth Changes Character
	1	is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation;	Long Droughts/ Sudden Floods
	2	against which the stream broke,	Binary: Blind/See, Good/Bad, Wise/Foolish
	2'	and immediately it <b>FELL</b> ,	? = How Can A Jesus Follower Become A Good Person
	1'	and the ruin of it was great."	<b>Churches Need Sober Realism About Wrecked Lives/Churches (7)</b>

**A Brief Treatment Of Luke 6:39-49**

The final of the three panels of Luke's *Sermon on the Plain* falls into three sections (vv.39-42, vv.43-45, vv.46-49) with the words *fall* (v.39) // *fell* (v.49) as the inclusion. The first and last (1//1') use questions to create the space for answers; the central section (2) does not. What ties 6:39-49 together is the theme of following a Jesus who has clear vision and gives followers new sight and good hearts. Discipleship is about being transformed in perceptions and actions. A true disciple follows Jesus with others, avoids disaster, eventually teaches others, offers correction only after self examination, shows their new and good heart in fruitfulness, speaks truth out of an abundant heart, and not only honors Jesus with the lips but obeys what is heard, building a solid foundation that endures testing. The alternative is disaster, falling into a pit or having your life collapse. The costs of disobedience are high for partial disciples who come and hear and confess *Lord, Lord* with great emotion but do not obey.

The format of 6:39-42 is shaped around double questions (a//a) followed by answers (b//b') and begins with a phrase, "He also told them a parable," that signals a new section of vivid comparisons. Jesus speaks in analogies, and the first image is ridiculous, "Can a blind man lead a blind man?" The answer is a question, "Will they not both *fall* into a pit?" Discipleship is personal apprenticeship, one life imprinting another. To follow one who does not see invites disaster; Jesus *sees* by constant divine revelation. That the questions are about discipleship is made clear in v.40 where the three stages of being *a follower* are outlined (in training, fully taught, a teacher). In Jewish circles a follower may exceed the master, but not with rabbi Jesus. To become *like the teacher* is the highest rank. The second set of questions (vv.41-42) counters the tendency to correct others prematurely. Disciples take what is objectionable in others as a call to inspect the self; only later may help be offered. A metaphor for the human condition is blindness. In the company of Jesus eyes are opened in self-knowledge and compassion.

The central paragraph (vv.43-45) builds on the common sense analogy between roots and fruit. What nurtures (figs, grapes) is good; what pricks (thorns, brambles) is evil. The question is: what is your life producing? Does it help or hurt people? If you listen to speech, *for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*, you discern the person. The principle is that actions (speech) reveals essence or being. The hidden question is, Who gives us a new heart? Who has ability to change us at the deepest levels so that we produce speech that reflects the new reality? Only the one we follow. We are all in process.

The concluding paragraph serves as the end to this section (6:39-49) but also to the *Sermon on the Plain* as a whole. Jesus begins with a contradiction. To confess him as *Lord, Lord* implies obedience; avoiding obedience contradicts the confession. He asks, *Why do you do this?* His question builds on the link between heart and speech in v.45c, *for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*. To come and to hear is easy when compared to obedience which is the hard work of digging deep and laying the foundation of one's life (house) on solid rock. *To come* is curiosity; to hear show *interest*, but only in picking up the shovel does deep transformation begin. Flash floods were common in desert regions during the fall rainy season. Both houses look sturdy when not under stress, but when the water rages and rises the depth of difference is exposed. Jesus' final phrase, *and the fall of it was great*, is a sobering reminder that life is for keeps and tests assured. I'm left with questions: Am I following Jesus and growing in sight and insight? Am I hard on myself and gentle with others? What is the witness of my speech, and what does it say about my heart? What do the tests of life reveal about my foundation? Will I stand?

## HOW A CHRISTIAN EXERCISES INFLUENCE

*“A disciple is not above his teacher....”*

Faith is caught and taught in a mentoring relationship,  
one life shaping another with sight and wisdom.

L U K E 6 : 4 0

**T**here was once a young man who desired to become a gemnologist, so he presented himself to the local expert. At first the expert brushed away his would-be apprentice fearing the youth would not have the patience to learn, but the young man was insistent. Finally the master consented, “Be here tomorrow.”

The next morning the gemnologist put a jade stone in the boy’s hand and told him to hold it. The master then went about his work cutting, weighing and setting precious stones. The boy sat quietly and waited.

The next morning the master again placed the jade stone in the youth’s hand. The third, fourth, and fifth day the expert repeated the same exercise and instructions.

On the sixth day the youth held the stone but could no longer hold his peace, “Master, when am I going to learn something?”

“You’ll learn,” he replied without looking up.

Several more days went by; frustration mounted. One morning as the expert beckoned him to hold out his hand, the would-be apprentice was about to explode at the monotony of it all. Without looking at his hand, the young man exclaimed, “This is not the same jade stone!”

“Ah,” said the master with a wink and a smile, “We have begun to learn.”<sup>1</sup>

I love giving books to people; many struggles are a result of simple ignorance. Lives can be changed by the right book at the right time in the context of the right relationship. Having to read and think is one cure for the modern curse of *quick-fix*

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Cavanaugh, *More Sower’s Seeds* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1990), 8-9.

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because there is no such thing. I know I have prescribed well when they come back and say, “It was scary. I saw myself on nearly every page.”<sup>2</sup> We then have a basis for further conversation. But knowledge from books is not the same as a habit or a virtue or a skill; faith must be *caught* as well as taught, *modeled* as well as theorized about, *coached* on the field as well as taught in the classroom, and that happens only in an apprentice relationship between a teacher and learner. These days we call it a *mentor* relationship or an *internship*, and it was the style of teaching in which Rabbi Jesus and other ancient teachers specialized.<sup>3</sup> He was the curriculum; they were the learners, and life on the road together was their common laboratory for viewing the effects of the kingdom of God at ground level. Dallas Willard puts it this way:

“When Jesus walked... there was a certain simplicity to being a disciple. Primarily it meant to go with him, in an attitude of study, obedience, and imitation. There were no correspondence courses. One knew what to do and what it would cost. Simon Peter exclaimed, ‘Look, we’ve left everything and followed you’ (Mk. 10:28). Family and occupation were deserted for long periods of time to go with Jesus as he walked from place to place announcing, showing, and explaining the governance (i.e. kingdom) of God. Disciples had to be with him to learn how to do what he did... it was the only possible doorway to discipleship.”<sup>4</sup>

In our day we have much curriculum but few teachers, many manuals but few

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<sup>2</sup> The Cloud and Townsend book *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) does this for most southern, Christian women! Most feel terribly embarrassed when reading it the first time. I ask them to come back and talk to me *after* reading it. Few do. It’s a good deal! Those who want relief without repentance stop at the initial stages.

<sup>3</sup> On discipleship as science and art, see Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Spring, CO: NavPress, 2006); Michael Wilkins, *Following The Master* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings On Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2006); Don Williams, *Start Here: Kingdom Essentials for Christians* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2006); Felicity Dale, *An Army of Ordinary Christians* (Barna: 2010).

<sup>4</sup> *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1989), quoted in Calvin Miller, *The Book of Jesus* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 347. See Willard’s article, “How To Be A Disciple,” *Christian Century*, April 22-29, 1989, 430-439.

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masters, much *information* about the Christian life but little *formation* in the habits that make it possible. Is it any wonder we are having so little influence on the culture? We know more than we do. We pile on more knowing so that the gap increases. And yet, my observation is also that there are credible disciples in every church, persons who- though they would not say it of themselves- have walked in the habits of the faith long enough to be able to coach others in the way of Jesus. Their scars are their credentials; they carry wisdom within; in their wrinkled faces are stories about how the life of faith unfolds. None one of them has it all, but one can teach you this, and another that. One can teach you to pray, another to tithe, another to listen to the promptings of the Spirit, another how to love your spouse or live a faithful single life. The teachers are already here.

And that is the subject matter that holds these three paragraphs together in a unity. How is it that we follow the Lord in community with one another? How do we stay out of the pits ourselves and not compound the disaster by leading others there? How do we keep our house from crumbling when trouble comes? Where is wisdom found? This teaching was not for the window-shopping crowds; it was for those who had already signed up for the Jesus course and the Jesus lifestyle.

So if you desire to be his follower, listen carefully. This is not Jesus the Army recruiter with heroic posters and promises of government benefits and spiffy uniforms; this is Jesus the drill sergeant kicking rear ends and taking names on a clipboard. He's teaching his followers how to survive on a battlefield where the casualties are everywhere. That may seem like a low standard to us- how to keep your life out of the ditch and your house together. But just look around and you will see that it doesn't take much to be above average in our day. In a world where many are falling, to survive with the Lord across a lifetime without falling into ruin is a noble standard, one Jesus said would take our very best.

### **Leader And Follower (vv.39-40)**

A certain scoutmaster used to take his troop on wilderness hikes. After each hike he challenged the scouts to describe what they'd seen. Invariably, the boys hadn't seen a fraction of what the scoutmaster had. After looking at their befuddled faces and hearing muddled answers, he'd wave his arms in a great circle and shout, "Creation is all around you, but you dunces are blocking it out. Stop wearing your raincoat in

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the shower. You were born to look, but you have to learn to see!”<sup>5</sup>

The church needs spiritual guides, lay and clergy who help others see because they’ve first learned themselves. Jesus’ questions in verse 39 are comic and tragic at the same time. One blind man leading another till they both veer off the precipice and disappear in a deep pit. They grope along; then they vanish! We laugh at the impossibility of it, and then groan, “Oh no! Is that me?”

But this is precisely what happens to those who apprentice themselves to blind leaders, false prophets and self-appointed gurus. In extreme cases they may die physically, but they will surely be hurt psychologically and spiritually. Think of Jim Jones and the deaths in the Guyana jungles. Think of those who starved their local churches and funded the PTL Empire before it fell in the pits. Think of those who disciple themselves to a TV minister at a distance instead of a living relationship with someone local who has to rub up against them on a regular basis and from whom it it’s hard to hide sloppy living. Think of those who give themselves over to Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses or other quasi-Christian cults. You cannot learn the moves of the Christian faith and the Jesus lifestyle without close relationship and local accountability. It’s always face to face and heart to heart.

Twenty-five years ago all our clergy were required to take a course in sexual ethics and avoiding because so many were messing it had become a public embarrassment and legal liability. It was a good class. But the pastoral counselor who taught us was soon dismissed from the ministry for sexual involvement with a client. The superintendent did not appreciate it when I asked at the next district meeting in front of all the pastors, “Does that mean we have to take the course again?” It was good for a laugh, but it was based on the questions of Jesus, “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?”

Be careful who you follow, who you adopt as a model or hero, who you welcome as a guide into the sacred territory of your soul. There are abundant options out there on the spiritual smorgasbord, and many are toxic. People are looking for spiritual leaders today, and they are not very discerning. I once read disturbing news in a poll titled “Take Me to your Leader!” In 1976 only twelve percent of the US population believed somewhat in *spiritualism* (contacting spirits); in 1998 it was

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<sup>5</sup> Edited, Brian Cavanaugh, T.O.R., *More Sower’s Seeds* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1992), 81-82.

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fifty-two percent. Belief in *astrology* (the belief that planets influence us) was also up dramatically for the same period: seventeen to thirty seven percent. The numbers for belief in *reincarnation* (a Hindu doctrine of many lives on the way to perfection based on karma) went from nine percent in 1976 to twenty five percent in 1998, and for *fortune telling* (the use of spirit guides through any number of occult media) from four to fourteen percent. Blind guides abound, and more and more of our gullible fellow citizens are following them. Guess what? Lots of people are falling into pits, which could be good news if the church is prepared to show them the true and life-giving path of following Jesus and the inherited tradition of spiritual guidance in the church. We must improve our skills at extraction and re-education; we must also know our own tradition of spiritual guidance.

The questions are in verse 39, the answer in verse 40, “A disciple is not above his rabbi, but everyone when he is fully taught will be like his rabbi.” That is not only a theory of life-to-life education; it is a criterion for how to find a faithful spiritual guide. They must themselves be a follower of the Lord. Check ‘em out! Ask! Observe their conduct! We learn the lore and legends and moves of the faith by imitating a living example. Dr. Charles Talbert sums up how the early church saw itself as a floating laboratory and classroom, “In the New Testament period new Christians learned the meaning of the Christian way *from those who were already Jesus’ followers*.”<sup>6</sup> We learn best from those a bit ahead of us on the way.

Three distinct stages of maturity are found in verse 40. First you are a *disciple*, a beginner who doesn’t know much. At stage two you are *fully taught*.<sup>7</sup> And for the first followers of Jesus it was three years around the clock. It takes time, and since our exposure is not as intense as theirs, it takes longer. An hour or two a week is pitiful. At stage three the cycle repeats itself when you become the *teacher* of

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroads, 1984), 76.

<sup>7</sup> One of the purposes of Acts 1:1-3, 4-11, the secondary preface to Luke’s two volumes, is to demonstrate that the apostles are fully taught. The deposit of faith given during the ministry is expanded during the forty days of resurrection appearances but not changed. However, being fully taught does not insulate one from errors of judgment, as 1:4-11 demonstrates where the disciples are corrected, first by Jesus and then by an angel, for the errors of end-time enthusiasm, religious nationalism, and passivity. The church needs regular divine correction as it applies the tradition in new circumstances (Charles Talbert, *Acts* [Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2005], 1-12).

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someone else. The pattern of three stages is repeated in verse 47, “Every one who *comes to me* (stage 1) and *hears my words* (stage 2) and *does them* (stage 3).”

Jesus is offering a maturation process so his tradition of spiritual wisdom and faithful lifestyle can be passed on in the community from one generation to the next. It is in leading others in this way as a pastor that I am myself driven back into it again and again. “I can’t do this Lord! The stakes are too high, and these people are a mess!” to which I hear a reply, “You can if you follow me. Keep your hand out to them, but keep your eyes on me.” The church is a teaching and learning community, with the pastor as the dean of a faculty of fellow teachers who are themselves committed followers of Christ willing to train others. We teach what we learn as we receive correction from Christ, from our colleagues, and sometimes from children.

### **Mutual Correction (vv.41-42)**

In the academy of Christ he is not the only teacher; we learn from each other as well. It’s easy to sit in church with one another, eyes forward for an hour a week, but if we move beyond mere membership to discipleship and community, we get closer to one another, which means that we learn each others flaws, blind spots, annoying habits, besetting sins and abiding prejudices. You know this if you’ve been married. You have to be close to see the painful speck of dust in their eye.

One of the universal effects of our spiritual disease is that we easily see the flaws of others and ignore our own. What we see in others we ignore in ourselves. Psychologists call it *projection*, and we all do it. If I keep to myself what I see in you, I become arrogant and superior, a silent judge of all I survey. If I share it with others and not with you, I become a gossip. And if I share it quickly with you, I’m a meddler and busybody.

So what’s the alternative? To look within.<sup>8</sup> To take what I notice in you as a cue that something within my own life needs to be addressed. Instead of being my project to be fixed, you become a window into my hidden inner world to which I am blind without your mirror. “You hypocrite,” said Jesus to those who didn’t first look within, “*first* take the log out of your own eye, and *then* you will see clearly to take

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<sup>8</sup> For guidelines and questions for self-examination, see William Martin, *Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1985), chapter 4, “Preparing Your First Confession,” 65-100.

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out the speck that is in your brother's eye." Only after the Lord has dealt with me on a matter dare I ask him for release to go to you about the same issue, only this time not with a *let me fix you* mentality but with mercy and a profound awareness of my own need. We resent those who want to barge in and fix us. We are more likely to welcome those who come with a story of their own failings and how Christ has dealt personally with them. And when they gently ask, "Is this perhaps a problem for you as well?" it's easier to respond with the truth. They come to help, not hurt.

Therefore, let gossip stop at Main Street since it's just another name for cowardice. What I will not say *to you* I have no right to say to others *about you*, and let there be no correction of one another without self-examination first.

There are some in every church who appoint themselves as *corrector of the pastor*. I hide if I see them coming. But there are a few in every church from whom I ask, "Do you have any wisdom for me? I know they love me; they are not gossips; they are in touch with their own failings, and I trust them to speak the truth in love, even if it stings. Like Mr. Wesley I trust them to "Smite me friendly."<sup>9</sup>

More than once I've been saved from disaster by such wise counsel, at times quite dramatically. For this church to regain health we must recover the tough love of mutual correction, what John Wesley called "watching over one another's souls in love," but it must be based on sober self-examination and the willingness to let others correct us as well. This is the only way we grow up. It is not meddling; it's love in action. And it is never done simply in anger or to embarrass or score points.

A mother once approached the great Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi for help with a domestic matter. "My son has horrible eating habits," she said. "Please, he will listen to you if you tell him to stop eating foods with so much sugar."

The wise man listened sympathetically, then said, "Come back in a week."

The mother agreed and returned in seven days. "My son's problem continues," she said. "I am greatly concerned about his health. He rarely eats vegetables or fruits. Please, won't you talk to him about the danger of eating so much sugar."

"Please, come back in a week," said the famous leader.

Though the mother was disappointed with his stalling, she returned a week later, and this time Gandhi agreed to speak with her son in private.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Jackson, editor, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1877), Volume VIII, p. 20.

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When the interview was complete, the mother was full of thanks. “I am grateful that you took the time to talk with my boy, but I don’t understand why it took three requests for you to do so.”

Gandhi gazed at her, “I didn’t realize how hard it would be for me to give up sugar.”<sup>10</sup> He understood Jesus’ counsel. Self-inspection precedes correction. Private victories precede public advice.

It is a part of the pastoral office to issue warnings about sin, practical correction, sometimes even rebuke.<sup>11</sup> It is a function that is too-often neglected in our day of hyper-toleration and anything-goes mentality in the culture and in the church. The second century church father Clement of Alexandria applies the flip side of Jesus’ words using a medical analogy:

“They physician is not evil to the sick person because he tells him of his fever. For the physician is not the *cause* of the fever; he only points out the fever. Likewise, he who reproves is not ill-disposed towards him who is diseased in soul. For he is not the cause of the transgressions on him. He only reveals the sins that are there.”<sup>12</sup>

So if we want our doctors to be honest in their diagnosis, why not our pastors and close Christian friends? But in our independent and morally rebellious age, such love is rare. We simply watch as other Christians go down the tubes, wringing our hands and saying, “Isn’t that terrible? I wish someone would help them.” But if it is presumptuous and foolish for the blind to lead the blind, is it not sheer cruelty for those who see not to?

### **Root Determines Fruit (vv.43-45)**

There is a deep, deep part of ourselves. Far below the intellect, beneath the froth of

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<sup>10</sup> William White, *Stories for the Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 96-97.

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), particularly chapter 14, “The Work of the Holy Spirit in Comfort, Admonition, and Discipline,” 206-219.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in David W. Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MASS: Hendrickson, 1998), 212.

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emotions, even deeper than the part of us that decides- the will. It is *the heart*, not the literal blood pump, though its location near the center of the chest is an apt metaphor. It shows up in our dreams and in our desires. Within ancient Jewish psychology the heart was the self at its deepest center, the place where loyalties are loves are held as treasures. It is prior to and determinative of character and of action. To change actions is to work on the surface; to work at the habits of character is to get under the skin, but to change at the level of the heart, that is where lasting change begins. The mind can be orthodox in doctrine and leave the heart unchanged. Behavior may conform to accepted moral norms and leave the heart unchanged. What we need for true revolution is a *heart transplant*, a new center of vital life.<sup>13</sup>

And how do you know if you have a new heart? It's simple, said Jesus. Listen to what comes out of your mouth. Spiritually speaking, the tongue is connected to the heart and only indirectly to the mind: verse 45, "... for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Our deepest self is the point of interface for the invisible spiritual realities of good and evil, but our words show our heart every day. The eyes are a window to soul and our words proclaim the heart. Listen to yourself for a week, then, "What have my words produced and from what deep orientation do they spring?" The root determines the fruit. We reproduce what we are. If your words are profane, then your heart is foul. If your words are complaints, you are an ingrate. If your words are stupid, your heart is foolish. You cannot change a bramble bush into a grape vine by hanging grapes on it. It produces what it is. To change the fruit you have to change the root. And when you try your best and fail at self-help, which you will, you know it's not something you can do on your own. We do not control our hearts; they control us. We must be given a new heart by the Lord. So whether it is new birth or heart transplant, the biblical image is of a radical cure that goes to the deepest self and comes as a gift. Life starts over with Jesus at the center of the self. Simply, we invite him into the heart for a total rehab.

He rabbi is a radical. He believed and taught that at the deepest level there were only two kinds of people: those who through grace and obedience became good and those who resisted both and became evil, in the end either children of God or children of the devil, with only God qualified to make the call. Look at lives and listen to words for a clue as to which is which. Do their lives nourish and provide for others, or is their life a crop of thorns and thistles? Are their words few and clear

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of these ideas, see Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987), 108-110.

and deep and true and kind, or are they many and muddy and deceptive and cruel. But you can have a new heart, a new center of life at the very core that changes the produce of your life and what comes out of your mouth. This is the good news of hope and help in Jesus Christ. His followers get *new eyes* to see, *a new heart* to know and even *new hands* to build a house that endures on a solid foundation. The tune of the hymn may be a bit corny but the lyric is not, “What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, *since Jesus came into my heart...*”

Thus far we have learned that spiritual leadership presumes spiritual followership which drives us through the flaws of our friends into deep introspection all the way down to the heart where we learn what kind of people we are. Our being is more basic than our doing.

### **A Bias Towards Action (vv.46-49)**

A seeker in search of a Master who would lead him to the path of holiness came to an ashram (i.e. Indian retreat center) presided over by a Guru, who, in addition to having a great reputation for holiness, was also a fraud. But the seeker did not know this, at least not at the start.

“Before I accept you as my disciple,” said the Guru, “I must test your obedience. There is a river flowing by the ashram that is infested with crocodiles. I want you to wade across the river.”

So great was the faith of the young disciple that he did just that. He walked across the river, crying, “All praise to the power of my Guru!” To the Guru’s astonishment, the man walked to the other bank and back unharmed.

Well, this convinced the Guru he was more of a saint than he had previously imagined, so he decided to give all his disciples a demonstration of his power and thereby enhance his reputation for holiness. He stepped into the river, crying, “All praise to me! All praise to me!”

Chomp! Chomp! Chomp! The crocodiles had a good lunch that day.<sup>14</sup>  
Who then was the real Guru, true Rabbi?

Jesus is relentless in his division of humanity into two piles. Those who are blind and those who see; those who first criticize others and those who first look within; good tree, bad tree; good fruit, bad fruit; deep foundation, shallow foundation; lives that endure, lives that crumble. There is no third option, no neutral ground, no

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<sup>14</sup> Edited, Anthony de Mello, *Taking Flight* (New York: Image, 1988), 132-133.

observer status. Life has a way of showing where we stand. Both houses faced the same flood; only one survived.

Some learn the lingo of the faith, “Lord, Lord,” and little more. Some are genuinely drawn; they come to Christ but never study his life and words. They once had a warm feeling in church but never cracked their Bibles much. They let others do their thinking and praying for them. Everything they have is second hand. Warm heart, empty head. Others become serious students, meditating their way through the Lord’s life with real effort of heart and mind. Write in their Bibles. Take classes. But if that is where it stops, the house may look substantial, but is not. Superficial. Surface. No depth of foundation. Shallow. And you don’t know till trouble comes. Death, cancer, divorce, addiction, financial failure, an overwhelming temptation or the like. But sometimes the flood that reveals the truth can be an unexpected inheritance, a promotion or sudden fame. “And the ruin of it was great,” said Jesus to end on a real *downer* note. We can’t hide who we are; life will reveal it.

At the beginning we see two blind men falling in a pit, and at the end a once-great house falling down. Disaster at both ends. Jesus is the most profound realist. He knows that most will make a mess of their lives, even if they claim to be following him. The final difference is not conversion, that once you came to him; it is not study, that you know his stuff; it is whether or not you obey, that we actually do what he says. J. Erik Johnsson, founder of the Texas Instruments Corporation, agrees with Jesus, “It is action that makes the difference. No matter what the vision, it must come to the point where we simply do our best and get the job done.”<sup>15</sup>

So before we go *out* in influence or *up* in visibility we must go *down* in foundation digging. It’s expensive and slow going to get to bedrock. The curse of the church in our day is not so much overt evil as superficiality. Sin we can deal with; evil we can battle, but what do you do with paralyzing triviality? With the habitual disconnect between knowing and doing? The storm is coming, the river is rising, and people are watching endless hours of TV sports and talk shows, turning their minds to mush and their spines into silly putty! When the test comes, they will not be ready. Where is seriousness and sobriety, where is zeal and holy fear? “Lord,” I say, “better that you should tear down what I have built and command me to start over than that I should continue to build with no foundation. Show me what kind of life I’m building before it’s too late.”

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<sup>15</sup> “To Illustrate: Plus,” *Leadership*, Summer 1998, 73.

Jesus is not speaking to outsiders but to insiders like us. Remember last week? “Love your enemies.” Have you done anything about it yet, or did you file it in that part of your brain labeled *sermons: not for real life*?

There is no less demanding way and no quick fix. Only the slow, steady obedience of doing what he said and finding ourselves changed in the process. This is not me being hard on the church. I live with this stuff too so that I might guide others. It is simply Jesus being honest with his followers about the demanding curriculum of kingdom transformation. Find a guide who can see; look within before you criticize others; love your brother and sister by covering their blind spots; listen to your own words as they bubble up out of your heart; and make sure to have a bias towards obedient action. Then watch what happens, first inside, then outside, then all around as you become an oasis of life, a solid house where others may find shelter. We are to be changed to be like our rabbi, like Jesus. It’s why we follow him.

### **Conclusion**

The question of verse 46 won’t go away. It exposes all of us who want bargain-basement faith, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not *do* what I tell you?”

*Ignorance* is easy to cure; from the storehouse of local saints Jesus provides us with a faithful spiritual guide who sees where we do not and who has been where we have not. Blind eyes open; the path is followed. *Arrogance* is not a problem either; Jesus rebukes us as play-actors and shows us the log in our own eye; he drives us into the depths for a look-see at good and evil within. Hearts change. But ignorance and arrogance are easy when compared with *indolence*. For the lazy and sorry there is no easy cure, only pain, and sometimes not even pain wakes them up. For those who know and do not do- the habitually spiritual sloths, the blobs of this life- the only cure is to be crushed, to fall in ruin, and then hope there is time and material to start again with a deep foundation of walking and learning and doing.

Where are you in this passage?

Where are we as a church?

Are we doing this Jesus stuff, or just talking about it?

Who are we kidding? Not him! And not anyone who really knows us!

**WHAT BLOCKS US FROM BEING MODERN-DAY DISCIPLES?**

(A newsletter article from St. Luke UMC, Hartsville, SC)

At a recent reading group on the book by Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Nav Press, 2006), Gerry Caffee asked a question from several angles: “How have we so missed Jesus’ Great Commission (Mt. 28:16-20) with its mandate to *make disciples* and teach them to do everything Jesus commanded? How did we get so busy in the church and so far removed from the main thing?” Bob Abbott chimed in, “How can we keep disciple-making from just become another program, another class, another box to be mentally checked off? It is possible for it to become a way of thinking and a way of life? How can it be a movement, something organic and life-giving?” Scott Cameron wondered if the practices of discipleship only appeal to our more *enthusiastic* members and leave most behind because of the extra demands?” A disciple-making movement that divides a church into first and second class followers has missed something. Joanne Merck then read us a powerful quote:

“Discipleship occurs when a transformed person radiates Christ to those around her. It happens when people so deeply experience God’s love that they can do nothing other than effect those around them. The heart of being a disciple involves living in intimate union and daily contact with Christ. Discipleship- the effort both to be a disciple and make other disciples- is about the immense value of God at work in one individual’s life and the resulting impact on other lives” (28).

In a second round each shared a story of a disciple who affected them, someone who took time to stir their heart to devotion to Christ, then helped them learn to pray and read Scripture in order to grow. Pastors were mentioned, as were parents and Christian friends. Everyone had a story; several were quite moving. We agreed God has faithful disciples hidden everywhere and that their effect is all out of proportion to their numbers. It doesn’t take much salt to season a much larger steak!

It was left to Pastor Phil to give some history on why making disciples has recently (last hundred years!) been a minor topic and lost practice among Methodists, and the reasons are primarily three. When we traded in the weekly accountability of the Methodist class meeting for the less demanding education model of Sunday School, we lost something. We studied together, but no one asked, “How is it with you soul?” expecting an answer. A second reason is that pastors have been trained in an academic model that has not emphasized spiritual formation and the practices of making disciples. Most are well trained academically, but have limited skill in leading others in following Jesus and molding our lives in his practices. Only disciples make new disciples; only plumbers can train new plumbers! Many pastors have never been discipled in a practical way with an emphasis on obedience, not on ministerial productivity. Thirdly, our culture of individualism and our insatiable appetite for privacy have effectively shielded us from the kind of personal probing that is so much a part of the process of opening our life to Christ and one another. It is time to recover a lost art, but where shall we begin?

Pastor Phil, a perpetual student!

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