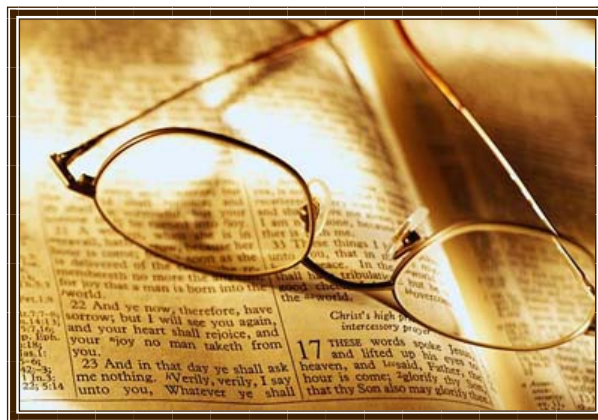


# "The Nature of the Body"

## Focusing on the Significance of the Christian Church

A Bible Study & Sermon Series  
February 7 - March 28



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February 7, 2010

## Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

by Allison Lairmore

### Introduction

**W**hat a hard saying the words of Jesus are as recorded in Matthew 6:15! Hear the words of the Savior, “But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” These words of challenge are hard words for many of us to hear. These are words of command. While we may understand with our minds the command to forgive others, capturing that thought and putting it into action is a different thing.

Such is the circumstance of writer Kelley Burke. In a story published in *Journey, a Woman’s Guide to Intimacy with God*, Burke references a hard time in her life that became a “spiritual marker” on her faith journey. Burke writes:

I went to my pastor, years ago, completely exasperated with a loved one. I told my pastor I could forgive this person if the hurtful behavior stopped. I asked him to pray that my loved one would change so I could forgive this individual once and for all. My pastor said he would pray, but then asked me to promise that I, too, would pray, not only for my loved one, but also for myself, every day. He said, “Promise me you will pray every day that, even if this person doesn’t change at all, God will help you love (the person) unconditionally.”

What do you think? Does a person have to be sorry before he is granted forgiveness? Must an individual stop the bad behavior and start being good before he can be forgiven? Is it possible to forgive someone who is not sorry for the wrong she has done?

Burke’s story continues:

As I prayed about the situation, I began to see that God was actually changing *me*. Through the circumstances that unfolded, God pierced my heart with understanding, compassion, and healing. He made me stronger and wiser so I could treat this person with the kind of love it would take to have the meaningful relationship I had always wanted. As backward as it sounds, it is not the changing of another person that heals us; rather, it is often when we change that others also begin to heal.

Through my constant prayers, God created in me a heart to love unconditionally, which I came to realize was the one thing this person had never experienced. God’s love never fails. It has the power to reveal things about yourself and others that, over time and with much prayer, the Holy Spirit can use to produce a harvest of forgiveness and love.

Max Lucado writes in *Just Like Jesus*:

“Because He has forgiven us, we can forgive others. Because He has a forgiving heart, we can have a forgiving heart. We can have a heart like His.” The words of Jesus in Matthew 18 draw us to a point of making that decision. Each of us must find the answer to the question: “How badly do I want to have a forgiving heart like the heart of Christ?”

### Biblical Background

Matthew 18 begins with the response of Jesus to the question, “Who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (vs. 1) A little child, brought to stand in the midst of the group, depicts the faith that Jesus references in His answer. The qualities he values most are humility meekness, innocence, and unpretentious trust. In order to forgive, to be reconciled with another, these attributes must be in place in our hearts.

An arrogant, uncaring heart and attitude will never have a place in the process of forgiveness and restoration.

Jesus speaks of the great value God places on the worth of every single person. The shepherd in vs. 12-14 is proactive, going after the single lost sheep. From the context, we see that the sheep depicted in this parable is one who is a fellow believer. We are to be like the shepherd as we reach out to those who have lost their way. We are to seek peace and restoration. We are to be like Jesus as we work to be reconciled to one another.

The heart of God is reconciliation. In vs. 15-20, Jesus lays out the path that is to be taken when a brother or sister suffers harm from another believer. The process to bring peace is clear. The instruction is simple. The one who has been wounded is to go first. Max Lucado says, “The one who is innocent is the one who makes the gesture.” A forgiving attitude is necessary if peace among God’s people is to be realized.

A further understanding of His teaching on forgiveness is revealed through the parable of the ungrateful servant (vs. 21-35). Although the servant was forgiven a huge debt—up to millions of dollars—he would not provide the same kindness to a fellow servant who was indebted to him. Severe punishment was the result. The implication is clear. For those who have experienced forgiveness from God, it is expected that they will offer forgiveness to others. The attitude should be, “Because I have been forgiven much, I will choose to forgive.”

In both readings of the Lord’s Prayer, found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, Jesus teaches of the forgiving heart and attitude that His followers are to have toward those who have offended them. “Forgive us our sins (debts) as we forgive those who have sinned (are indebted) to us.” According to commentators in *Hard Sayings of the Bible* published by Inter Varsity

Press, “It is implied that the person praying has already forgiven any injury received; otherwise it would be impossible to honestly ask God’s forgiveness for one’s own sins.”

Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness is not for the faint of heart. His words cut to the core, making us who claim His name more than a little uncomfortable. Perhaps Peter is searching for a way out when he asks the question, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother?” (vs. 21) The answer from Jesus is straightforward and unexpected. He says, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Some translations say “seventy times seven.”) Regardless of the translation, the meaning is clear. The number of times we are to forgive others is without measure. Forgive, forgive, and forgive again is indeed a hard saying!

### Questions to Consider

How often is the Lord willing to forgive?

How often should we forgive others?

Why should we forgive others?

What do you think of Max Lucado’s statement in *Just Like Jesus*: “The one who is innocent makes the first gesture?” How does this statement fit with the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18?

What things keep us from forgiving others?

What blessings does the Lord promise if we are forgiving toward others?

### Life Application

The decision to forgive rests on the individual who has been wronged. So how will you choose to forgive the one who has wounded your spirit? “Forgive and you will be

forgiven.” This teaching from Jesus really is a “hard saying”.

Perhaps God is speaking to you right now as you study in your Sunday School class. Maybe He is bringing to your mind a person you have found hard to forgive. It may be that you are hearing God’s voice as His Spirit speaks to your heart. Is He calling you to act on the things that you have learned today?

If so, spend the next few moments in prayer, asking God to forgive you for your lack of forgiveness to others. Claim the words from I John 1:9: “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Thank Him for working in your life to bring you to a place of forgiveness. Recognize the fact that to experience God’s forgiveness in your own life is the first step in reconciling with your brother or sister.

Over the last few years, I have spent a good deal of time in the Wound and Healing Center of a local hospital. My mother is diabetic and sometimes experiences deep cuts and breaks in the skin on her legs. Being a diabetic, healing is slow and it is necessary for proper treatment to be given to her so that infection will not take place.

The healing process is painful. The wraps and bandages that she has to wear are heavy and cumbersome. The medicines are strong and sometimes sharp instruments are needed to “debris” the dead tissue so that new, healthy tissue can grow. The process is long and painful, but the only other option is to ignore the wound and hold back on treatment. Only with proper treatment will the wound heal.

Like a wound that is healing, so it is with developing a forgiving spirit toward another. Hurt has been done to your soul and spirit.

The wound is deep and your flesh is torn. As you seek ways to forgive the person who has harmed you, the wound begins to heal. Healthy flesh begins to spread across the opening, covering the exposed tissue and bringing the opportunity for healing.

Eventually the scab forms. Whatever you do, don’t pick the scab! Leave it alone and eventually it will come off on its own, leaving healthy tissue and only the small appearance of a scar. The scar becomes the reminder of the healing that has taken place.

Leave the unforgiving thoughts. Claim the power of Christ to help you set aside the wrong that has been done to you. Once you have decided to forgive the one who has wronged you, rely on God’s strength and promise. He chooses to “remember [our] sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34.) Wouldn’t it be refreshing to choose never to remember the wrong done to you? Ask Him to develop in you the same lack of memory that He has so that you can be like Him and have a heart that is truly like His.

February 14, 2010

## Unity

Philippians 2:1-2

by Tom Beam

### Introduction

**W**e seek UNITY of spirit and purpose – because we are called to be one in Christ. Unity fosters inclusiveness. It embraces a vibrant and vital diversity. We trust one another, faithful that God is at work in every believer.

Because we all have the same beginning that is found in the grace of God through the Cross of Jesus, we then have other things in common. Moving from, and because of, salvation through the blood of the Cross, we all have the same promises. No one believer is promised more than another. We all have received the Spirit of Christ, making us the temple of the Holy Spirit, for instance.

We have all received the same commands, and the same calling to discipleship. We have all been called to use our spiritual giftedness for the glory of Christ and the edification of the church, and we all should be reminded that God is at work in every believer to grow us into the image of His Son. In these similarities we find our unity of purpose and grounds for our trust in one another.

The Unity Paul wrote about is not one that we must recreate, it is already there. Nowhere does Paul speak of unity meaning uniformity. No Christian will think or act or perform identically to another Christian. The love which we have for one another should trump our differences. Unity is how we stay together with our core – grace through God and through the Cross, and all receiving the Spirit of Christ. Diversity of the gifts God has given us leads to Unity. As a matter of fact, diversity should necessitate Unity.

In the recent movie *Invictus*, Morgan Freeman plays the part of Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon plays the part of Francois Pienaar. The film tells the inspiring true story of how Nelson Mandela joined forces with the captain of South Africa's rugby team to help unite their country. Newly elected President Mandela knows his nation remains racially and economically divided in the wake of Apartheid. Believing he can bring his people together through the universal language of sport, Mandela rallies South Africa's rugby team as they make their historic run to the 1995 Rugby World Cup Championship match. Mandela has been released from prison and then is elected President of South Africa. While attending a Rugby match he says, "All the whites are cheering for South Africa. All the blacks are cheering for England. That must change." Mandela saw that there was no unity between blacks and whites. He saw that the commonalities between whites and blacks were country and sports. So he set out to inspire the Springboks (SA National Rugby team) to win the 1995 Rugby World Cup being held in South Africa. He says to Pienaar, "How do we inspire ourselves to greatness when nothing less will do? How do we inspire everyone around us to exceed our expectations? This country is hungry for greatness!" Mandela knew that the country could only be as great as its UNITY. The Springboks won the World Cup! The whole country celebrated, blacks and whites together. Unity in some form was achieved by using the common interest of all people, loyal to country and sports.

### Biblical Background

Our Scripture lesson today comes from Philippians 2:1-2 NIV.

*"<sup>1</sup>If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup>then make my joy*

*complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”*

## Background

Paul's letter is offering his thanks for his beloved converts' gifts to him while he is in prison. He had heard of strife and discord within their fellowship, and writes encouraging words focused upon their fellowship and exhorting them to live in Christian harmony with each other. Philippians 2 speaks of the deep expectations that Jesus Christ has for Christian fellowship, and uses his example to teach the church how to get along.

The literary context of these passages begins with the word "If" which captures the thought of verse 1:27, which is a "bridge between the apostle's call for the unity of the church in the face of threats and a continuation of that summons for such concord and harmonious community relations as will gladden his heart" (Martin). It is preceded with a prayer by Paul that the Philippians may love each other with knowledge and discernment. After speaking about his imprisonment, Paul summons them to display good conduct that reflects the gospel of truth, and gives deeper instruction into that concept and then reminds them that their conduct is a testimony to the unsaved.

It is the Christian fellowship of intense love that has brought the church together to embrace the blessings of Christ. However, Paul speaks of an even deeper need within the fellowship of believers to keep their togetherness in a place that would bring joy to Him. It is good that love, compassion and the moving of the Holy Spirit in our midst brings us together, but to have true fellowship we must have the same love for each other and Christ, the same sentiments, and the same mind.

Taken from various Biblical Commentaries on Philippians.

## Questions to Consider

What is the standard in which Christ set for us as it deals with unity?

From what does Unity grow?

From whom does Unity grow?

Other question to ponder:

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ?

Any comfort from his love?

Any fellowship together in the Spirit?

Are your hearts tender and sympathetic?"

February 21, 2010

## Compassion & Flexibility

Zechariah 7:8-14

by Asad Hashemi

### Introduction

**T**he word compassion means: (1) a deep awareness and sympathy of the sufferings for another. It also has a second definition: (2) the humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to alleviate the suffering. In addition to having the sorrow that is felt for the suffering of others, it is willingness and an urge to assist them. It is an unselfish need to reach out to relieve their need or suffering. The word actually means to do something about feeling sorry, to be affected by their situation. It is to enter into one's sorrow and pain. When we feel true compassion, we will be moved inwardly and outwardly. Having empathy is to have one's heart reach out toward the needs of others. To be compassionate is to pity, to be kindhearted. It means to be tenderhearted; to be sensitive and affectionate; to be moved with tender feelings over the pain and sufferings of others and to do something about it. God says in Zechariah that because we don't listen to his commands and his word, he will refuse to listen to us when we call. When we harden our hearts to the needs and cries of others, this passage says God will be angry and leave us desolate as he punished the Jewish people. We are no different than them. God has made us in his image and calls us to be made in the likeness of his Son.

### Background

Zechariah 7:8-14: (NIV)

And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah. This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the

poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other. But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry. When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord Almighty. I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate."

### Life Application

Are you listening to God's commands?  
Are you obeying His commands? Scripture says if we love him, we will keep his commands.

We are to be Holy as God is holy. We are to reflect the character of God. Read these passages on the character of God:  
Psalm 116:5-The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.  
Exodus 34:6- And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming " The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Psalms 86:15-But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger; abounding in love and faithfulness.  
Psalms 119:156- Your compassion is great, O lord,

Psalms 145:8-The Lord is gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

Isaiah 54:10-" Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the

Lord, who has compassion on you.  
What did you learn? How would you describe the compassion of God?

Jesus taught by example how to be compassionate. He understood feelings of others, his compassion and righteousness was perfect:

Matthew 9:36-When he saw the crowds, he had *compassion* on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into *his* harvest field.”

Matthew 20:32-34-Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. “Lord,” they answered “we want our sight.” Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

Matthew 15:32-Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people, they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

List some of the people or groups Jesus showed compassion to.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Which of these groups would you have opportunity to show compassion to?

Jesus looked for opportunities to show compassion: List additional ways we can look for these opportunities:

- Seeking out the sick and lonely
- Nursing home, hospital visits (not only elderly, but handicapped as well)
- Get involved with support groups.
- Visiting those that are homebound
- Get to know your neighbor by visiting with a tray of cookies.

What about singles? Can you invite them to

join your family for outings or dinner?  
What about young moms with children? They need older women to guide and mentor them. Do they have parents near them? Could you be the grandparent their children need? Look for the foreigner, the alien that does not know the language or culture. Many opportunities exist in the ESL/international ministry and language church ministry.

What keeps you personally from reaching out with compassion to win souls for the kingdom of God? Is it a lack of courage or a lack of compassion? Is it a lack of flexibility? What changes can you make? Which ones will you commit to make?

When Jesus responds in compassion it is often a turning point in one’s life.

Whose life can you make a difference in? (Name an individual or ministry opportunity open to you through Forest Hills.)

Read the story of Moses’ life. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word “hamal” is translated “to have pity, to spare, to have compassion”. It is used to “that emotional response which results (or may result) in action to remove its object from impending difficulty”. It is used in Exodus 2:6 to describe Pharaoh’s daughter when she saw the baby Moses. This compassionate event changed history. What do you think we as a church could do to show compassion to a group being persecuted (such as the Jews were during this time) that could change history?

Scripture teaches we are to be compassionate to others with the same compassion God has shown us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4: Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

List 5 specific ways you have been comforted

and how you can comfort others in this same way.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you find it difficult to have compassion on those by the roadside with signs asking for help?
2. What can you do when the sign says “Will work for...?”
3. Can you think of any time in your life where that could have been you needing help?
4. Do you sometimes feel these people have been irresponsible and thus don't deserve help?
5. How can we, at Forest Hills Baptist, show compassion to those that may still be irresponsible and at the same time not contribute to their irresponsibility?
6. How can Forest Hills help families that have needs even if they are not responsible?

Get in groups of four and discuss these issues.

February 28, 2010

## Servanthood

Matthew 20:26-28

by Jane Pan

### Introduction

A pastor was serious about being a good “servant” of Jesus Christ and decided to demonstrate this by actually going out to the community and cleaning toilets. He would go to a business in his area and ask if they wanted to have their toilets cleaned. Most looked at him with bewilderment and some were touched by his actions. One time, he went to a truck stop and asked the manager if he could clean their toilets. “Sure” was the reply. “We have 20 toilets.” The pastor was surprised and taken aback, there is no way he could clean all 20 toilets. He answered, “I will clean 2.” The hardened manager fired back, “either 20 or no toilets!” The pastor thought hard and finally said, “I came to demonstrate the love of Jesus, and I will finish it.” The manager said, “I only had two, but I wanted to see if you really practice what you preach!”

People all around us are watching how Christians act. They want to see if we really believe in God by demonstrating the act of servanthood.

Elisabeth Elliot once said, “The best way to find out whether or not you really have a servant’s heart is to see what your reaction is when somebody treats you like one.”

A servant is one who is useful to others. A servant is somebody who serves another with humility and willingness. A common saying is “God helps those who help themselves. However, the Bible teaches us “God helps those who help others.”

What does the Gospel say about Christians as servants?

### *Matthew 23:11-12*

“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Many Christians today think they have all the answers. They serve with pride instead of humility. Jesus is teaching us here that greatness comes from serving others and not ourselves. Many Christians today operate on their own perceptions. Perceptions are not the truth. Time and time again, we have seen how dangerous perceptions can be. Take for example the perception that one race is better than another. Hitler tried to eradicate all races that he perceived to be weak. He ended up a villain in history. Christians should not perceive that their ideas are better than others. Some Christians even go as far to say that what they have perceived are the truth and God is on their side. We have to be very careful not to pull God down. He loves everyone and gives everyone an opportunity to serve and grow. If we are to be good examples and leaders in the church, we must have a servant attitude. We must be faithful and loving followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse in Matthew 23:11-12 tells us that if we are to be a servant (serving in a church), we are not to exalt ourselves or think our viewpoints are the gospel truth. We must serve with a spirit of humility. If we do not we can easily be manipulated by Satan and his dark force. I remember something one lovely Christian woman told me while I was a college student. She said, “Jane, humility is your protection.” If we exalt ourselves and push our viewpoints in serving, Satan will have his field day. He loves prideful people, because he fell from grace due to pride. We must serve with humility, counting others as better than ourselves. Jesus Christ is the master of the church, we are all his servants!

***Matthew 20: 26-28***

“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Many Christians accept Jesus and have a great plan, to be great for our Lord. We want to make a difference and have a good impact on this world. However, Jesus taught us that in order to be great, we must be servants. This is really against what the world teaches; this is against the social norm. Who wants to be a slave to those around us? As leaders of the church, we are to demonstrate love and grace from a new perspective. Instead of using people, having them serve us, we are to serve them. We are to humble ourselves to a point where we appreciate everyone’s worth. We do not think of ourselves above others. We are to serve them as slaves to our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. We serve because of our obedience and love to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ set an example for us to follow. He gave his life as a ransom, the price paid to release a slave from bondage. We were former slaves who were under the bondage of sin and death. Christ redeemed us from the bondage of sin and death.

The problem with many Christian leaders is pride. Since we know what we are talking about and we have the experiences that back us up, we think people need to listen and obey us. Pride comes before downfall. Many prideful Christians act as masters of the church. They are masters to the leaders, masters to the teachings, masters to the preaching, and masters of their pastor(s). If the leaders of the church serve as humbled slaves to our Lord Jesus Christ, only Jesus is the Master, and then Satan has no foothold in this church. Many Christian leaders do not realize Satan is using

them through sinful and disobedient pride!

George Washington was a humble servant. He was the first president of the United States and the only president who did not live in the White House. He designed and planned the building of the White House knowing that he would not live in it himself. He was thinking of the Presidents to come, building a building that befits the President of the United States. He envisioned greatness for others and used his precious time to serve others instead for his own benefit. A great leader is a humble leader who thinks of others before he thinks of himself.

Today, if all the leaders of the United States government also had this humble and servant attitude, wouldn’t United States be a great place to live for everyone? However, there are many stories where we hear of senators or congressional representatives who pass or influence laws to benefit themselves rather than the common people. They give themselves big raises. They take trips on government expenses. They give their kinfolks government jobs. They buy and sell choice real estates before the news is out for the public, and other examples you probably can name that are in the news today.

If the church leaders cannot lead humbly, then the church is not a church but an organization that thrives through competition, power, and pride. The leaders have become CEOs and the members have vested rights.

We are to come before the cross and humble ourselves. Look up at the cross and see the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came so that we can become the children of God. We are to love one another and think of others as better than we are. We are one family who serve, love, and learn together. We are leaders because God has given us spiritual gifts, called us to serve, only to magnify the love of our

Lord Jesus Christ.

***John 13:1-5***

“Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He now showed the disciples the full extent of his love. It was time for supper, and the Devil had already enticed Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to carry out his plan to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water in a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.”

Even though Jesus knew Judas was going to betray Him, he still humbled himself and washed the disciples’ feet. Here is something we all must learn. Jesus the Son of God gave us an example of the highest grace. He loves the disciples, including Judas, and all of us. The grace that He has bestowed upon all of us is not because we deserve any, but simply because Jesus loves all sinners. He knew he was going to the cross, yet, he was not thinking about himself, he was thinking of the ones he would leave behind. The greatest love He showed is that He set the example of being a loving and humble Master. If He, the Son of God, our Master, can wash the disciples’ feet, why can’t we follow and wash each other’s feet? Jesus showed us what genuine humility is: it is Love and Grace in Action.

**Life Application**

After the Sunday school lesson is over, prepare a few basins and towels. Start to wash each other’s feet. When you are washing, be silent, and ask the Holy Spirit the true meaning of this act. After washing, use remaining minutes for discussion on how you felt washing each other’s feet.

May God richly bless you as you serve with love and grace; that is humility in action!

**Questions to Consider**

***A. Matthew 23:11-12***

1. How do you humble and exalt yourself in ministry?
2. Do you have any personal experience in serving with humility?

***B. Matthew 20:26-28***

1. How do you treat those people who work under you? Do you love them and follow Christ’s teaching here?
2. What did Jesus do that makes us think twice before we serve others?

***C. John 13:1-5***

1. Can you love a person who has done you harm? Even to the point of washing his feet as Jesus did to all his disciples?
2. What is the real reason Jesus washed the disciples’ feet?
3. Judas betrayed Jesus. Yet, Jesus loved him and humbled himself before Judas. Are you able to forgive and serve your enemy?
4. Are you serving in the church? If not, ask God “Whom can I serve today instead of “where can I serve” or “what can I do?”
5. Are you willing to serve in any way that may glorify God?

**Prayer**

“Oh Lord teach me to obey you in my areas of serving. It is not what can I do or where I should serve, but whom can I serve? There are people who are hurting in our church; can you use me to be your humble servant? If I need to go to that person, can you give me the attitude of a slave who is ready to wash that person’s feet? I know it is hard. You did it for me; can I do it for you? Amen”

March 7, 2010

## Community & Accountability

Matthew 12:36-37, Romans 14:12

by Ngoma Masiala

### Introduction

**T**here is a moment of truth, sometime in the future, which no man can escape. In the day of judgment, every person, black or white, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, must render to God a personal account. This will be a moment of truth because the God to whom we are accountable is a God who sees all things as naked and open. Nothing can be hidden from him.

Becoming accountable to God is a matter of development, a learning process. As the Scripture says: “When I became a man, I put away childish things.” (I Cor. 13:11)

Accountability is essential for any society to function and Christian accountability is no different. We are all held accountable in one way or another. For example, there are laws to obey and if we fail to be obedient, we may have to suffer the consequences set by the officials who hold us accountable. Accountability is simply being responsible for one's actions.

Accountability also involves a willingness to open yourself up and share sensitive or personal information. This is why trust is so imperative. If you sense trust, you are more open to sharing your innermost thoughts without concern of betrayal.

An accountability partner is a trusted, spiritual friend who helps us see our lives more clearly with the intent to grow us in faithfulness. All of us need a person who works with us; a personal trainer of sorts who offers encouragement, direction and holds us

accountable. Thus, the spiritual discipline practice of an accountability partner provides a person who stretches us, who helps us to grow in faith, broaden our perspectives and see God in life's choices and challenges.

We may be thinking that we already have plenty people to whom we are accountable. I have no doubt that we do. However, this is different. An accountability partner is not your spouse, parent, child or sibling which I call a “comfort zone.” It is true that if you are married you are accountable to your spouse. That's automatic; that's why we say : “I do”. We are all accountable to family members, to our employer and employees. We can go so far as to say we are accountable to our pastor, too.

When it comes to our faith and the day-to-day ways of living out that faith, an accountability partner is different from anyone else in your life. That relationship is voluntary and intentional. It has to come from an “uncomfortable zone.” In our case someone from Forest Hills may have a partner who is a member from the African, the Chinese, or the Iranian Church and vice-versa. In the Old Testament book of Amos it says, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3). So often the path of our faith development and growth is walked alone. We often think faith is a private and personal thing. That's unfortunate.

As Christians we are also accountable to one another. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we read that Christians are all part of the same body. The Body of Christ and each member needs or belongs to the other. This Scripture suggests the importance of strong accountability among believers. It is important for every believer to have at least one other person in which to confide, pray with, listen to and encourage.

## Biblical Background

### Warning Against Unbelief

Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

**But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.**

I Thessalonians 5:14-15 (NIV)

**14 And I urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**

**15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.**

Ephesians 4:15-16

**15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.**

**16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

We live in a fiercely individualistic society, which has some great strengths. But it often means that people explore their spirituality individually as well. And while there is certainly an individual component to our spiritual journey, our Biblical witness is that at its roots, our faith journey is a communal one: that's why church is essential. We need to encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today.

Apostle Paul addressed this message not merely to leaders. Every believer is to live this in these days. The Apostle points out, first, special behavior toward three distinct types of people: the idle, the faint-hearted and the weak. "Warn the idle," he says. The word is literally, "the disorderly," those out of step with the rest

of the crowd. In Thessalonica, it meant those people to whom he had referred earlier who had quit working because they expected the Lord to come at any moment. These were living off the gifts of others, and were not willing to work and support themselves. "Admonish them," says the Apostle. Tell them to mend their ways. Do not let them go on like that. He does not mean to do this in a mean-spirited way, but to point out to them that this kind of behavior is unacceptable. Then, second, "encourage the faint-hearted," literally the "small-souled" person, one who feels inadequate and ungifted. "Help them find their place," says the Apostle. This is addressed to everybody.

In the wonderful picture of the body at work in First Corinthians 12, the Apostle says, "The ear cannot say, 'Because I am not an eye I am not part of the body'. No," says Paul, "even if it says that, it does not make it any less a part of the body," (1 Corinthians 12:16). There are people who feel that way. They think, "I cannot do anything. I do not have any gifts." That is wrong thinking. *God has equipped all his people with gifts. We are to help each other find our place, give everyone something to do and encourage them in the work that they are doing.*

Also, "Help the weak ones." This means help those Romans 14 describes as being "weak in faith" (Romans 14:1 KJV); That, in my opinion, requires little extra effort; a phone call, perhaps, an invitation to lunch or a quiet talk about their needs. *This is addressed to all of us. We are all to watch out for one another as a community of faith.*

There are three attitudes, Paul says, that are required for this:

First, "be patient with them all,"

Second, "see that none of you repays evil for evil."

Third, "do good to one another and to all."

Romans 10:12-15 (NIV)

**12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,**

**13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

**14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**

**15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”**

The emphasis here is positive: all can be saved by faith. Here Paul quotes two Old Testament passages: Isaiah 28:16 which affirms the need for belief while Joel 2:32 proves that salvation is open to all people and to all races.

Our ministry is to nurture, connect, and equip believers. We need to help people identify their gifts, train them with skills to nurture those gifts and then provide community support to sustain them in their use. By doing so, we are responding to Paul’s concern that the community of believers encourage one another in becoming what they want to become: fully contributing members of the community accountable to each other.

### Questions to Consider

1. To whom are we accountable?
2. Is accountability something which is always imposed upon us, or can we choose to opt into it?
3. Why do we need accountability?
4. As Christians, in what way are we accountable to God, to the church and to each other?
5. What is a practical way here at Forest Hills

Baptist Church we can become accountable to one another?

6. How can we develop a strong system of connection among members that crosses church ethnic boundaries?

### Life Application

Accountability involves a willingness to open yourself up and share sensitive or personal information. This is why trust is so imperative. If you sense trust, you are open to share your innermost thoughts without concern of betrayal.

Relating as a community of faith is an important factor in Christian accountability. It is helpful when the group shares a common bond or has been through similar experiences. People who relate to one another can empathize and share with an understanding heart. They feel comfortable and believe that they will be totally accepted without fear of rejection.

The Bible, as we have seen, speaks about being accountable to one another. First of all, the Bible says that God hold us accountable. Romans 14:12 says, “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” This is personal accountability.

We are also accountable to one another. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, we read that Christians are all part of the same body which is the body of Christ and each member needs or belongs to the other. This Scripture suggests the importance of strong accountability among believers. It is crucial for every believer to have at least one other person in which to confide, pray with, listen to and encourage.

March 14, 2010

## Entrusted with His All: A Biblical Understanding of Stewardship

Psalm 24:1-2; Luke 19:11-26; Matthew 22:37-39;  
1 Corinthians 4:1-5

by Alta Whitt

### Introduction

**I**t's a fun little game we've all played. Someone says a word, and you say the very first word that comes to your mind. No cerebral processing allowed, just an impulsive response. Word associations can be expected, funny, or even embarrassing. Quite often, they are revealing. In a little experiment of my own, I recently played the game, and threw in an unexpected word, "stewardship." Sadly, I was not surprised when first responses (money, sermons, offering) reflected a somewhat limited and poor understanding of a word that actually is illustrated with some of the richest word pictures in all of Scripture.

How far we have been led astray in our understanding from Scripture! In just one example from Genesis 39:4-6, we see that the steward, in this case, Joseph, was the most trustworthy servant from among the most wealthy, elevated to a specific and unique position of power, privilege and responsibility. I dare say that today, in most churches, we are inclined, maybe even conditioned, to consider stewardship as having to do only with money or finances, and we treat it as a duty of obligation and guilt, rather than a position of great trust.

To study in depth the complete and full meaning of what it means to be a Christian steward is far beyond the scope of one lesson. So it is with a broad brush that the four objectives in today's lesson are being presented. It is my hope that you will continue on your own, taking up smaller, finer brushes

to paint the complete and beautiful picture of stewardship as God has intended.

### Biblical Background

#### Possession

Determine from Scripture, "Who owns it?"

Psalm 24:1-2

We love to call things "mine." We embroider, monogram, stamp, sew, print and engrave our names on everything, from baby blankets, to shirts, to welcome mats to Christmas stockings. What exactly is the lure of ownership? Perhaps our things validate us. Cars give us status, jobs give us power, and bank accounts give us security. Almost by any standard, we live in a society of affluence, and the message is this: If we own something, it is part of our domain, and if it's part of our domain, we rule it. Even to traits and characteristics that are attributable to genetics and heredity alone we stake our claim... beauty, height, build, personality, temperament, family. The temptation and lure of ownership vie for our allegiance in powerful ways, and just as certainly, we are woefully wrong, according to the Scriptures, to claim anything good as ours. In the Scripture for this lesson objective, the Psalmist proclaims something completely different. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it" (Psalm 24:1-2). In his book, *The Steward*, Douglas John Hall writes, "What is established here, once and for all, is that ownership, mastery, ultimacy of authority, and sovereignty are attributable to God alone" (Henderson, pg. 38). But isn't that exactly what God said to begin with? After establishing ownership and authority in Genesis 1:1, God entrusted to Adam and Eve the responsibility to fill the earth, subdue, work it and take care of it. But never did He relinquish ownership.

## Questions to Consider

1. What does “Lord” mean?
  2. What is ownership?
  3. What right does God have to claim ownership?
- What are proper responses to God’s ownership?

### Perspective

“Broaden individuals’ perspective and knowledge of Christian stewardship.”

Luke 19:11-26 and Matthew 25:14-30

Accepting the foundational truth that God owns it all, it is imperative that we ask, “What role is ordained by God for you and me to fill?” Reference has already been made to the entrusting of creation and life to humankind (Genesis 1:28), and unquestionably, each of these commands/mandates is worthy of deeper study and application. But it is in the New Testament, in the Parables of Jesus, that we will find focus and challenge, not as humankind, collectively, but individually, as followers of Jesus. In these familiar parables, we recognize that the Nobleman (Master) represents Christ. The servants (slaves), like us, answer to the master. According to the ability of each servant, the master entrusts his possessions to them. The word “entrusted” is translated from the Greek word, *paradidomi*, which means “to deliver to one something to keep, use, take care of, manage” (Partain, pg. 4). Note this is not a transfer of ownership. Rather, we are entrusted as managers, or stewards. We are to care for God’s creation and God’s possessions, just as He would. In legal terms, we have a fiduciary responsibility. “A fiduciary is someone who has undertaken to act for and on behalf of another in a particular matter in circumstances which give rise to a relationship of trust and confidence” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiduciary>). Also key is that the Master plans to return and settle accounts each of the stewards to whom He has entrusted his possessions. Our

responsibilities are for a time, and while the date for settlement is not known, two expectations are clear. One, we are to be productive, and manage things well, so that there is a positive return (Luke 19:13). Two, we will be held accountable (Luke 19:15). Lastly, the principles applied to the money (minas, talents) in the parables can and should also be applied to all that is entrusted to us by God. “Everything you and I have is an entrustment from God, including our body, mental capacity, soul, relationships, talents, time, positions, possessions, environment, salvation, prayer, the church, the Bible, the Gospel...everything we are and have!” (Partain, pg. 4).

## Questions to Consider

1. Describe the special relationship between God and those whom He’s entrusted as stewards. If you are in this relationship, how does that make you feel?
  2. Are there consequences for bad stewardship? What are they?
  3. Make a list of God’s “property” that has been entrusted to you.
  4. Re-read the last sentence above. Are there areas of your life that you’ve never honestly considered to be fully owned by God? How does this understanding of stewardship change anything for you?
- How might you reflect this deeper understanding of stewardship in your family?

### Purpose

“Deepen one’s understanding of God’s purpose in entrusting us with all that is His.”

Matthew 22:37-39

To be in this type of relationship with God is to share His hope and vision for his creation. In this most special of relationships, we are participating partners, not silent partners, in God’s good and perfect purposes. God wants us to use all that with which we have been entrusted to love him and to love others. Such

a perspective changes our priorities. In this radical paradigm shift from ownership to stewardship, we are delivered from the entrapment of greed and self-centeredness. We grow in our understanding of the nature of the Kingdom. Our eyes see past our time on earth, and glimpse eternity. And we become bold in our helping others to know Christ and experience His salvation.

### Questions to Consider

1. If God owns everything, what distinction, if any, is there between secular and sacred?
2. How might priorities differ for an individual who has a Christian world view versus a non-Christian?
3. Give an example from the Bible where an act that made no sense to the world was commended by Jesus. (or an act that made good sense to the world was condemned by him.)

Take an inventory of your week. What have you done? What have you spent? Where you have gone? With whom have you spent your time? Evaluate your week using the Scripture as your guide to success.

### Personalize

“Explore practical ways to apply stewardship principles in one’s personal life.”

I Corinthians 4:1-5

In his letter to the believers at Corinth, Paul reminds them once more that they are “servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” As servants and stewards, we own nothing, and we don’t know everything that God knows. Yet, under his authority and for his purposes, we are to manage everything with which we’ve been entrusted. How very different is this “God owns everything-stewardship,” from those stereotypical 1<sup>st</sup>-response word associations.

Consider the following list of gifts and resources. Select one gift or resource that you

have not normally thought of as belonging to God. Read the accompanying Scripture. For one minute, reflect on how you might use this particular gift entrusted to you by God to love God and others. Share your thoughts and insights with the class.

### God Trusts Me With

Time	Psalm 90:12
Body	Romans 12:1
Mind	Romans 12:2
Possessions	Proverbs 3:9-10
Work	Ephesians 4:28
Earth	Genesis 1:1, 28
Relationships	Ephesians 5:21
Spiritual Gifts	Ephesians 4:7, 11-12
Friends	Proverbs 17:17, John 15:13
Words	Ephesians 4:29, 5:4
Home	2 Kings 4:8-10,
Neighbors	Luke 10:27
Challenges	Romans 5:3-5
The Gospel	I Corinthians 15:104
Marriage	Proverbs 5:18, Hebrews 13:4
Wisdom	James 1:5-8
Family	Joshua 24:15
Children	Psalm 127:3-5,
Ephesians 6:1-4	
Money	Matthew 25:14-30
Position	1 Peter 2:5-10
Influence	Matthew 5:13-16

### Close

“Stewardship, then, is not the begrudging business of prying loose our grip from what is rightfully ours. Rather, it is the joyful relinquishment of what never belonged to us in the first place.”

March 21

## Freedom in Christ

2 Corinthians 3:17

by: Doug Thompson

### Introduction

**T**oday is the *Fifth* Sunday of Lent. Next Sunday will be Palm Sunday, also known as Passion Sunday. Palm Sunday begins Holy Week, “The Passion of our Christ”, in which we observe Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and conclude with Easter the following Sunday.

As we continue our journey toward the week of “The Passion of Our Christ” it is very appropriate for us to reflect on one of the reasons Jesus gave Himself for us...our true *Freedom*.

In 1995 the movie *Braveheart* was released, starring Mel Gibson as William Wallace, a Scotsman fighting for his freedom. The tag line for this movie is “*the courage to fear no more*”. The plot of the movie is based on the fact that his country was in subjection to the English with no personal rights or privileges. William Wallace leads his people to rise up and fight against this bondage...even at the end, after horrific torture and near death, Wallace will not be broken, and instead of begging for mercy, he cries “Freedom!” one last time. (2) As a result of his martyrdom his people fight and gain their freedom from oppression.

How many of us have “*the courage to fear no more?*” How many of you sitting in this room are free? When you say you are free, what do you mean? What are you free from? What are you free to do?

“Freedom”...the word itself has differing definitions and implications that affect each one of us. In the United States we are, without a doubt, the absolute “free-est” people in the

world. Our country was established with freedom as one of its pillars and one of its most inalienable rights. In fact, the very Preamble to our Constitution states... “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*” We state with pride and vigor that our very “Creator” gave us this right. We celebrate and enjoy a “freedom” that the people of the world envy.

As wonderful as this is and exciting as it makes us we are not here to discuss the “*political*” or “*physical*” freedom of our lives but rather the “*spiritual*” freedom of our souls.

### Biblical Background

Our Scriptural focus for today’s lesson is found in 2 Corinthians 3:17 NIV  
“*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*”

Before we can begin to understand this verse however, we must see how it came to be. In the Old Testament we see the Biblical record of the commandments and laws to which all mankind was required to subscribe in order to be acceptable unto God. These commandments set the boundaries of daily ritual, life and worship. There can be no doubt that these laws were just and righteous, for they were given by God Himself. But they were also given because mankind had issues with accepting God’s guidance and provision as we see in the exodus journey of the Israelites from Egypt. Through Moses God spoke and told the Israelites that if they would adhere to the commandments then He would bless them. What began as God providing freedom for His chosen people and the promise to make them a mighty nation ending up being relegated as a complex set of do’s and do not’s by those same chosen people. God’s promise of freedom *was* contained in these laws, but man’s

understanding was legalistic, and spiritual interpretation was only to the extent that these laws were to be strictly adhered to in accordance with man's standards. As a result, freedom became enslaved to the law.

The question then arises; "When did the freedom intended in the commandments of God become a type of bondage for mankind? What happened? What was missing?"

As we progress through the historical timeline of the Old Testament we see God's commandments being transformed into a rigid set of laws. These in turn were enforced by priests who simply became overseers of these laws. Now when these priests were originally selected they were true to their tasks of leading the people but this system became corrupt and the law became a type of bondage. (Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and following) God's people were unable to see past the physical being and requirements of "a" god and see "God" Himself. They desired more and more to worship a tangible "thing" and were satisfied to endure the requirements of the law. In so doing they traded away the intangible "freedom" of the worship God so wanted them to share with Him. The world slowly and painfully found itself in a dark and "god-less" time. But, even in this darkness God had a wonderful plan in store. Though the darkness was intense "*Freedom*" was still very much alive and soon to be re-discovered in the birth of a child.

God's word contains prophecies of the freedom to come...

Isaiah 61:1-*The Year of the LORD's Favor*

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

Luke 4:18-The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.

Galatians 5:1-It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:13a-You, my brothers, were called to be free.

Ephesians 3:12-In Him through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

The birth of Jesus was the answer to the darkness. In these Scriptures we see the very reason for Christ's coming into the world. He was born, died and resurrected so that we might be free from the bondage of this world. Jesus' sacrifice is the gift of freedom. Here, then, is the quandary we face. In order to be truly free we have to make a choice. Accept this gift or reject it. God has never nor does He now make us accept or worship Him. Therein lies the true freedom we have – it is His utmost desire that we be His people, but He loves us so much that He wants us to come to Him freely.

Dr. Harper has given us insight into these verses... "As Christians we celebrate freedom in Christ as expressed in the historic free-church tradition. This means that individually and collectively, we seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit to aid our discernment of the will of God and empower us to act upon it without any outside influence." In other words we are free to seek and discern the will of God in our own minds and hearts.

## Life Application

Because of where we live, "freedom" for many of us is simply something we take for granted. We were born with it, it has always been a part

of who we are and as far as we are concerned it will always be available. It wasn't a choice we had to make – it simply is. But here is where the idea of freedom becomes confusing for so many. As we mentioned earlier we are not here to discuss the “political” or “physical” freedom of our lives but rather the “spiritual” freedom of our souls.

*Questions:* So how do we obtain this freedom? What grants us this freedom? Where does it come from? What gives us this freedom that nothing else can?

In Luke 4:18-21 NIV-we find Jesus speaking in the synagogue in Nazareth: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Jesus is telling those around him that He is the “good news or freedom” they are seeking. He is proclaiming to them that the “Spirit” of freedom sent from God himself was right in front of them. What they had been searching so many years for was now sitting in their midst. The *Freedom of Christ* was theirs for the taking if they would only believe. He could and would show them the way to the Father, the path of freedom that would release them from their earthly bondage. But as we find in the following verses of Luke 4 (verses 22-30) *All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn't this Joseph's son?” they asked. Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’ ” “I tell you the truth,” he*

*continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy<sup>f</sup> in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*

Jesus was neither accepted or believed – in fact He was, as the Scriptures tell us, “furiously” rejected. The Jews wanted an earthly King, a warrior with a sword and an army to win their physical freedom. Totally self-absorbed and selfish, they were spiritually blind, literally “poor” in spirit, and could care less about the opportunity to be truly free. They simply wanted someone to win their freedom from Roman oppression – and when they did not hear what they wanted, they responded with anger and hatred. They felt they were already free spiritually, the law was their freedom – but they wanted their physical freedom. Little did they know just how blind they really were.

*Questions:* Has anything changed, even to this day? What are we searching for? Is it the true freedom in and through Christ? Or is it simply the freedom to do, say and believe as we want – in short, what many in the world refer to as freedom.

2 Corinthians 3: 17- *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”*

When Jesus ascended into heaven he told the disciples that He must return to the Father but He would not leave them (us) alone (Acts 1

and 2) – that the “Holy Spirit” – the Comforter would come to them.

As a young boy I had questions about the Trinity, and especially the Holy Spirit...

“How could there be 3 in 1? And how could this Holy Spirit live in me? What did this mean?” I was given a very simple explanation and it has stayed with me. God the Father is Almighty, Creator, Sustainer, Holy, just way too big to live in me – as God He cannot be in the presence of sinful man; there was simply no way He could “live” in us – He could not come to earth as God, we would perish in His presence.

But, He found a way to come to us in human form – through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was born, walked on the earth with man as a man, and loved us so much that He was crucified, died, and resurrected for us. Even so, Jesus could not “literally” live in us, He was God in human form. Then, God found another way – the Holy Spirit, the very Being of God and Jesus in a form that could live in us. God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit – 3 in 1, living in me!

*Questions:* How do you understand who/what the Spirit of God is? Do you have other explanations which could help others to see and know God’s Spirit?

2 Corinthians 3: 17-“*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*” Freedom in Christ – the essence of Christ living in us. When we repent of our sins and accept Jesus as our Savior, God becomes our Father and the Holy Spirit indwells us. The result of the gift of the Spirit living in us is that we are truly free. Now this freedom is not of this world so it does not conform to the world’s standards. In fact some could say that we are not free, but in another type of bondage. And in truth we are in bondage, but not bondage as the world sees it. We are more like children, we belong to God and He is our Father. Our lives are no longer

our own but His. Does this then make us prisoners? Most definitely not – God has not and does not take away our free will – He wants to love us, to provide counsel, to give guidance, and to protect us. We are no longer alone nor do we have to fear the world and sin. We then have the “*courage to fear no more*”.

Dr. Harper continues: “No one holds some type of control over us in faith. We are not subject to anyone when it comes to the manner in which we believe and in which we practice our belief. We are accountable only to God in Christ. The measure of true belief is not the church or government or other believers but Christ Himself. That is why He is called Lord. Anything defined in our lives is defined by His life. That includes freedom. We are free in Christ to be His. We are free because of His gift that produced our salvation. To have another means of salvation or another system that validates salvation is to remain in bondage.”

“We are grateful for our freedom in Christ, for we can discern the leadership of the Holy Spirit for ourselves in personal and corporate mediation and commitment. The Word of God and the Will of God are understandable because of this freedom, allowing us to be formed rather than coerced, encouraged rather than guilt ridden, joyful rather than fearful. Within the community of faith, we exercise this freedom in Christ by being priests to one another, hearing each other’s conflicts and pain while enjoying the spiritual fellowship that forever binds and builds up the Body. Freedom in Christ means we can be real with God, each other, and with ourselves. No more games are required.”

As children of God we have direct access to our Father – we do not have to go through another person to speak to Him or hear from Him. His Spirit lives in us and we are truly free, we have *Freedom in Christ*.

March 28, 2010

## Bold Intentionality

Luke 19:28-40; John 14:12-14; 2 Timothy 1:7  
by: Jerry Chiles

### Introduction

**O**n December 1, 1955, she stepped onto the bus as she had so many times before, but she says she never planned to be arrested for breaking a racist law. She sat down in the front row of the black section. A white man got on the bus but there were no more seats in the white section.

The bus driver asked her to move back to make room for the white passenger, but Parks was convinced that to do so would be wrong--and she refused to get up. "Since I have always been a strong believer in God," she says, "I knew that He was with me, and only He could get me through that next step."

"She saw her participation in the struggle for justice as integral to her being a disciple of Jesus," said Peter Gathje, a professor at Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tennessee. "Because she recognized a law higher than human law, she knew that breaking an unjust human law was perfectly consistent with her Christian faith."

By now you realize that the person in this introduction is Rosa Parks, and her actions helped to start the civil rights movement. Rosa Parks did not have the intention of starting the civil rights movement but she did have the intention of living out her Christian faith, and when the time came she was given the boldness to stand firm against wrong.

On a matter closer to home: The election of the Wake County School Board this past fall has been interesting to follow. A group of parents have been aggressive about securing a

As a result the new majority has moved quickly to initiate its agenda. Regardless of your position in the matter, you must agree that both the group of parents and the newly elected officials have been intentional and bold.

### Biblical Background

There were times in Jesus' ministry that he was both intentional and bold. One such occasion is found in Luke 19:28-40. (Other parallel passages are Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11: 1-11; John 12:12-19.)

This story is called "The Triumphal Entry" or "Jesus' entry into Jerusalem." It was Jesus' time to declare that he was the King, but in an unexpected way.

It was not an accident that the events unfolded as they did. Jesus had chosen to make his last trip to Jerusalem (Luke 17:11). In all probability he had joined the crowds headed to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Unlike the situation in John 6:14-15, Jesus knew that the timing was right.

According to William Barclay, not only was Jesus intentional about his entry, but it was "an act of glorious defiance and of superlative courage. By this time there was a price on his head (John 11:57). It is a breath taking thing to think of a man with a price on his head, an outlaw, deliberately riding into a city. It is impossible to exaggerate the sheer courage of Jesus."

Luke:19 28-34 It is necessary to understand that the phrase "Going up" is used when moving toward Jerusalem regardless of the altitude or direction. Jesus pauses at Bethany about two miles east of Jerusalem as he waits for the disciples to prepare for his entry into the city. He sends them to get a colt in a nearby village. Can you imagine going to someone's house and taking something without asking? Those were Jesus' instructions. They go and get the colt and the man asks 'why are you

taking my colt?" Jesus had instructed them to say, "The Lord has need of him". It is possible that Jesus had a relationship with the family as he did with other families in the area (Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) or that the man recognized the title "Lord." Whatever the case there was no discussion about taking the colt.

Why a donkey colt? Why not a white horse or an Arabian steed? After all doesn't a king ride the most beautiful horse in the kingdom? In this parallel story Matthews references Zechariah 9:9,

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!  
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and having salvation,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. NIV

This scripture gives us a hint as to why Jesus was intentional about a donkey colt that has not been ridden. By riding a colt, He was laying claim to Messiah-King, but not with militaristic and nationalistic ambitions. His host was a symbol of humility, gentleness, and of his mission for salvation and peace.

Vs. 35-38-As they started up the western slope of the Mount of Olives, the crowd heading to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover laid their coats in the road recognizing him as King. According to the verb context this laying of coats was not just a one time thing, but rather a continuous effort. Matthew records that many people cut branches and placed them on the road. The crowd was excited to see their Messiah-King. Can you imagine what the added reaction was when they topped the Mount of Olives and saw the sun bouncing off the temple? Wow, what a glorious sight! Now the crowds became even more excited and broke out in praise of God. The Messiah-King was ready to enter Jerusalem, the holy city. The crowd began to quote Psalm 118:26, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord." They would have been familiar with

this Psalm as it was sung with the Feast of the Tabernacles. The praise continues, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Unlike Mark (11:10), Luke uses "glory" rather than 'hosanna'. Glory would be more understandable to his Gentile readers. This message was one we have heard before. In Luke 2:14 "glory to God in the highest" is a message that the angels gave to the shepherds.

Vs. 39-40-We now see the Pharisees coming into the picture. Luke indicates that they are part of the crowd, while John (12:19) indicates that the Pharisees are just observing and complaining about what is going on. Regardless, the Pharisees confront Jesus by saying "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." They are afraid of Jesus challenging their power and afraid that the Romans might bring force against a Messiah-King. They refuse to call him king, using the lesser term 'teacher'.

Jesus does not tolerate them. He said, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Notice that Jesus does not say the rocks may cry out, but that the rocks WILL cry out. If humans cannot acknowledge him, then nature will step forward. Something impossible will happen. How intentional is that?

In John 14:12-14 Jesus instructs us concerning how we are to be like Him. Jesus has two key words for us: faith and ask. Faith in verse 12 is not just a head belief but a total investment. It is putting our whole life in the hands of Jesus. The result is doing greater things. A.T. Robertson says the language indicates that greater means "more things" rather than "bigger" things. Asking in Jesus' name (Verse 13) is not an off-the-cuff inquiry. It is based on the total investment mentioned earlier. We say, "but he is Jesus, how can I do what he did?" We all ask that question, but in this passage Jesus says we can have his power. Finally, Jesus says that the purpose for such power is to bring glory to the Father.

In II Timothy 1:7, Paul instructs Timothy to be bold and intentional. He says Timothy is to have a spirit of power and not a spirit of timidity. When the spirit of God comes to live in us, He makes the same power available to us that Jesus was referring to in John 14:12-14.

### Questions to Consider

1. What part or character would you have played, if you had been in the triumphal entry with Jesus?
2. What does your choice in #1 tell about how bold and intentional you are?
3. What is the reason you need to be bold and intentional about your faith in Jesus?
4. If the people of the world want to know about Jesus, there are churches everywhere. Why do they need me to tell them about Jesus?
5. I know I'm not Jesus and yet he says that I will do more things than he did. How can that be?
6. What is it that gets in the way or keeps you from doing more things than Jesus did?
7. Everyone is different and that is why one size does not fit all. What one size program have you tried that was not a fit for you?
8. What causes us to be immobilized when we see gifts in someone else that we do not have?
9. Knowing your own personality and your gifts, what are ways that you can be bold and intentional about your faith?
10. When was the last time that you told someone about how God is at work in your life?
11. When was the last time that you intentionally listened to someone else's story to discover what his need was rather than trying to tell him something?  
When was the last time that you gently nudged someone toward Jesus?

### Life Application

All this study about Jesus and power is well and good, but I'm not Jesus. I'm just an ordinary person living an ordinary life. Studies show us that only about 10% of a congregation has the gift of evangelism. What about the other 90% of us? What are we to do? Jim Henderson author of Evangelism Without Additives says that boldness is overrated. In saying this, he then goes on to redefine it. Henderson quotes Harvard professor Joseph Badaracco, "The most effective leaders are rarely public heroes, these men and women aren't high profile champions of causes and don't want to be." Henderson goes on to say that what we need are "ordinary attempts." Ordinary attempts are things that anyone can do. "It is an attempt not an accomplishment, so no extra credit is awarded for succeeding and no demerits are given for failing." He goes on to say we are not asking for something, but we are giving something. "I want to be like Jesus. I want to be with people Jesus misses most. .... I want to partner with Jesus in seeing them cross the starting line into the kingdom of God." Is what he is saying beginning to peak your interest? Do you begin to see that there is hope for moving off of dead center? Henderson says that we can be intentional by connecting with people; by asking questions, listening to the answers, and sensing their needs. In doing this we will exercise the spiritual art of noticing. When we give this kind of attention and love, people will respond differently. Not every intentional act is face to face. For instance Henderson talks about praying behind people's backs, demonstrating ethical behavior and other invisible things. However, it is all done with the intentionality of nudging the person gradually toward Jesus. Henderson says that we need to reclaim what he calls:

### An Ordinary Christian's Bill of Rights

You have the right to partner with God as he draws another person closer to himself.

You have the right to speak on God's behalf and tell others about Jesus.

You have the right to feel God's heart as someone begins to trust him.

You have the right to watch God use your ordinariness to nudge people toward him.

So now I am ready. I'm fired up or I'm seriously thinking about it. Just point me in the right direction. I am willing to develop relationships, listen to other people's stories and share out of my own faith experience.

Who are they? I thought most everybody goes to church. According to David Kinnaman author of Unchristian, outsiders (Nonchristians ) make up about ¼ of Elders (age 61 plus) and Boomers (ages 45-60) while outsiders make up more than 1/3 of Mosaics (ages 18-25) and Busters (ages 26-44). These statistics tell us that they are all around us.

They can be found in our neighborhood, in our work place, at the gym, sitting on the bleachers for soccer games, at the bookstore, grocery store, and on the walking path. They come in all shapes and sizes, all ages, and are the people Jesus misses most. The time is now for each of us to accept the power offered to us and give who we are and what we have experienced in Christ to those who do not know who Jesus is.

