

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Sharpening Discipleship's Focus

(Learning from the Gospel of Luke)

Jesus' Pathway to Power

(Luke 9:1-23)

Study #3

Introduction: The ways of Coach Jesus...

In these weeks, we are listening to Jesus teach us about what it means to follow Him. We're exploring the life of discipleship.

Last week we listened as Jesus taught His disciples about the life of prayer. The punchline to His invitation to prayer was that God would give the Holy Spirit to everyone who *"asks, seeks, and knocks."*

That promise came at the end of a long section that started with the disciples making a request. After seeing the intimacy Jesus had with His Father in prayer, they asked Him, ***"Teach us to pray."***

They wanted the same. They were hungry for intimacy with God. You could say that they were asking for the Holy Spirit.

So, Jesus answered their request by giving them a model prayer (what we call The Lord's Prayer), a liberating parable (the story of the friend at midnight), and the assurance that God responds to our prayers as we would expect a perfectly loving Father to do.

The promise at the end was NOT that God would give us anything for which we might ask, see, or knock.

He certainly wasn't promising a blank check response to any and all prayers.

Jesus was promising that God will give us the resources for intimacy with Himself - His direction, presence, and strength. That is, He'll give us the Holy Spirit.

That was the topic that Jesus and the disciples had been talking about since the question, ***"Teach us to pray."***

It's possible that any of us might hear Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit and wonder, *"So, does God not care about the things that concern me?"*

That's a question that disciples of Jesus often wonder about. We would do well to think carefully about that question as we consider discipleship. So, let's think about it like this...

Consider an athlete who approaches a well-known coach to help him get ready for a major competition.

The coach agrees to take the athlete through his training regimen to get him in shape to win.

Mid-way through the training, the athlete is exhausted, on the brink of collapse. He's more tired and sore than he's ever been because of his coach's coaching.

So, he goes to his coach after one more grueling workout and asks, *"Don't you care about how I feel? Don't you know that I'm in pain from all this training?"*

The coach explains that, of course he cares about the athlete's well-being. But he wants to make clear that cares about preparing the athlete for the upcoming competition more than he cares for the athlete's comfort.

He wants that athlete to win the prize.

God's plan for the disciple when it comes to prayer is not to give the disciple a new means to get the things he or she wants. Prayer is a gift God uses to train the disciple to want what God wants.

And THAT is an ultimate win for the disciple.

A lot of the training Jesus takes disciples through may, at times, feel uncaring. We might think that what God does or what God allows is evidence that He doesn't care. It is nothing of the sort.

He cares for us more than we could ever know. But His care for us is on a higher plane than our fleeting pleasures.

Jesus cares deeply about our ultimate welfare. The hardships He allows are transforming us into stunning trophies of grace and are equipping us to win a priceless prize.

So, today, along the lines of a coach who is training his athlete to win the prize, Jesus points us in a hard direction as He trains us in the use and the release of power.

To this point the twelve apostles have mainly been spectators to Jesus' ministry. No longer. He is about to involve them in kingdom work. They become His partners in ministry.

Jesus huddled them all together before He sent them out on a short-term missions trip.

Jesus Introduces His Disciples to Kingdom Power (9:1-17)

Igniting Vision for Powerful Kingdom Work (9:1-6)

Sent out with power (vv. 1-2)

[9:1] Now He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and the power to heal diseases. [2] And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.

We aren't told how this power was transferred - whether it was by laying on of hands or by prayer. Nor are we told if the apostles were aware at the moment of the transfer of power.

We do hear the marching orders He gave once He had given them this power.

Instructed and provided for (vv. 3-5)

[3] And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics. [4] And whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city. [5] And as for all who do not receive you, when you leave that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."¹

They were to make no preparations for this journey. *"Get up and go, just as you are."*

Every missions trip I've ever taken has NOT been like this.

No matter where I've gone on these short term trips, there has always been a lot of preparation. I've had to think through what to pack, get vaccinations, send off to get visas.

The apostles were instructed to do none of this.

Plus, I have depended on the support of those who have sent me out on these trips - namely, YOU! Jesus told the apostles to depend on the goodwill of the people to whom they were going.

Wherever they found a receptive audience, they were to share the Good News, heal the sick, and cast out demons.

Once this missions trip began, they got right to work.

Mission accomplished! (v. 6)

[6] And as they were leaving, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.²

¹ It was well-known that Pharisees would shake off the dust from their feet when they re-entered Judea after traveling in heathen lands.

² Evidently, this was a very productive time of ministry, as we see from the response of a Jewish ruler, Herod Antipas. (vv. 7-9) Herod was the one who had gotten rid of that pesky John the Baptist. But after he had John put to death, Herod was hearing that the One John had been talking about - Jesus - had been performing all sorts of miracles and was even more disruptive than John had been. Now, Jesus' followers were doing the same things Jesus was doing. Poor Herod was so confused.

Luke tells us that when they came back, they got with Jesus and told Him about all that happened on the trip.

Imagine the thrill it would have been to have been travelling with Jesus, watching Him heal the sick. That's what the apostles had been doing. Now imagine doing the same yourself.

Imagine having seen Jesus hold crowds spellbound while teaching God's truth - and now you're doing the same.

This missions trip took these men way out of their comfort zones. None of them were trained public speakers or theologians.

But they did as they were told. They proclaimed the Good News to people they didn't know in cities they had never visited.

And on the trip, God provided for all their needs. He also provided, through them, for the needs of those they met. They experienced, firsthand, God's power.

By this trip, Jesus altered His interactions with the Twelve.

No longer were they merely spectators, watching Him do stuff. They were now partners in proclamation and in healing.

They were tasting what it was to wield the power of God in the lives of others. If you were one of the Twelve, a new vision of how you want to invest your life would be forming.

You're thinking, *"This - pressing eternity into the lives of others, taking a risky faith venture for Jesus, seeing the power of God - is what I was made for."*

With that experience behind them, Jesus blessed His men with another vision-expanding experience.

So, the adrenaline was still flowing from their missions trip when they reported back to Jesus. He knew that exhaustion was just around the corner.

Igniting Vision for Bringing Powerful Blessing (vv. 10-17)

A time for retreat...Oh well... (vv. 10-11)

[10] When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. And taking them with Him, He withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida.

They went to Bethsaida for some R&R, but the R&R didn't last very long. It likely didn't last as long as Jesus had intended or as long as the disciples would have wanted.

[11] But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and He welcomed them and began speaking to them about the kingdom of God, and curing those who had need of healing.

I'm struck by Jesus' response - ***"He welcomed them."*** I can picture myself being a bit less gracious. But then, that's Jesus for you.

Luke tells us that He engaged with them. He taught them about God's ways, and He healed those in need.

While all of this good stuff is going on, there was a crisis looming. Surprisingly, it seems that the disciples were more aware of this crisis than Jesus was.

A crisis of resources (vv. 12-13)

[12] Now the day was ending, and the twelve came up and said to Him, "Dismiss the crowd, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; because here, we are in a secluded place."

I'm impressed - and surprised - to hear that the disciples were concerned for the welfare of the crowd.

There were no restaurants or inns nearby. There was no food at hand. So, they asked Jesus to do something: ***"Dismiss the crowd."***

Jesus had other plans. He told His disciples, ***[13a] "You give them something to eat!"***

To which they shot back, **[13b]...“We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people.”**

They were utterly confused by Jesus’ words, which was exactly what Jesus had intended.³

Crisis resolved! (vv. 14-17)

Luke tells us that there were about five thousand men present, not counting the many women and children who certainly would have also been there.

Jesus gave instructions to His disciples, **[14]...“Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each.” [15] They did so, and had them all recline.**

Did you catch that? **“Have them recline to eat...”** - to eat what? There wasn’t any food.

The confused disciples obeyed - and then Jesus brought clarity.

[16] And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and, looking up to heaven, He blessed them and broke them, and gave them to the disciples again and again, to serve the crowd. [17] And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

The Twelve distributed the food that Jesus multiplied and supplied.

We picture them walking from Jesus to a group, back to Jesus and then over to that group. They served and served until everyone was full.

And we notice that in recording this event, Luke says nothing about the response of the crowd.

Feeding them was the effect of the miracle, but their response was not the point.

The points are:

- (1). the power of Jesus.
- (2). the abundance of the provision.
- (3). the role of the disciples in providing what the multitudes needed.

While they had been on their missions trip, the Twelve caught a vision for impacting people with the power of God.

Here, at the feeding of the five thousand, the vision for their lives became clearer. They started to see the ministry they could have through Jesus.

He provided fish and bread; they gave it to people. Jesus enabled them to do for the multitude what they could never have done by themselves.

So, for the rest of their lives, they would be passing on to others what they received from Him. They would bring life and health and joy and Gospel through the resources Jesus provided.

It was that vision of being conduits of Jesus’ love and power that He wanted to fan into flame in the hearts of the Twelve.

It’s the vision He’s putting before us today, too.

Just think about being God’s instrument in the lives of the people around you.

Imagine walking through your world like the disciples walked through Galilee on their missions trip. You’re meeting needs in Jesus’ Name. You’re speaking about Jesus to those who need Jesus.

Imagine walking through life like the disciples did at the feeding of the five thousand. You are God’s conduit of blessing, distributing food and healing and love and Gospel - to people in need of what only Jesus can provide.

Wouldn’t that be great? Doesn’t that sound, well, powerful?

³ This is one of the only miracles that is recorded in all four Gospels.

I'm sure that the first disciples were loving it. They were having the time of their lives.

But, having seen this exercise of power, we move on to see something else disciples need.

As we keep the two powerful scenes we've just looked at in mind, we listen as Jesus sets the stage for a focus on another side of discipleship with a question.

Jesus Introduces His Disciples to the Release of Power (vv. 18-23)

The Revelation of Jesus' Powerful Identity (vv. 18-20)

[18] And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?"

This is not to say that Jesus led by paying attention to polls.

But He did want to know what people were saying about Him. So, He assumed that His followers had heard the latest scuttlebutt. And they had.

[19] They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen."

Then, Jesus asked them another question, which was the point of having asked the first one: ***[20a] "But who YOU say that I am?"***

To no one's surprise, Simon Peter (always the spokesman) answered, ***[20b] The Christ of God."***

After all they had been through with Jesus, they were confident that this powerful preaching, parable-telling, miracle-working, disease-healing, demon-casting-out, sin-forgiving, walking-on-water, fish-and-bread-multiplying Man is the long-awaited Messiah.

Peter was right. He got an A+ on this test. Jesus was the Messiah, and the other disciples were behind Peter all the way: *"What he said!"*

With Jesus' identity on the front burner, what follow is Lesson #1 in the apostles' graduate level course on the theme of power.

What to DO with Jesus' Powerful Identity (vv. 21-23)

Don't share THIS powerful news (v. 21)

[21] But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone...

So, this earth-shattering news, *"Jesus is the Messiah!"*, will not be shouted from the rooftops. It won't be proclaimed in the streets. The one message the disciples were sure would propel Jesus to the position of power He deserved will be kept under wraps.

As you may know, Jesus didn't always, but He did often, command silence.

He told a man whom He had cleansed from leprosy to tell no one. (Luke 5:14) He told the family of a young girl He had raised from the dead AND the disciples who witnessed that miracle to tell no one of what had happened. (Luke 8:56) And there were other times.

There were always reasons for commanding silence when He did so. Sometimes it was to keep the crowds away.

Why silence now? About His identity? The command to silence relates to the theme of power.

The disciples had wielded power on the missions trip and had been His powerful providers at the feeding of the five thousand.

Jesus wants them to know that just because they had power or had access to power didn't mean that the power play was always the right play.

By telling them to NOT tell others that He was the Messiah / The Anointed One, the King, He was teaching them that the path to power and position and prestige is not always the path to follow.

Sometimes, it is best to NOT do the thing that leads to prominence. Go the other way.

The disciples were listening. I suspect that they were unsettled. They're about to get more unsettled as Jesus continued with Lesson #2.

The powerful Messiah's powerless way (v. 22)

[22] saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised on the third day."

Apparently, this was the first time Jesus told His disciples about His coming passion. The timing could not have been more...odd.

Right after Peter's identification of Him as Messiah, He let them in on the story of His life's trajectory. Rejection. Execution. Resurrection (whatever that means!).

Jesus was the most powerful Man who had ever lived - and He will be killed. That's exactly what doesn't happen to the powerful.

He will allow the rulers to do this to Him. Talk about power turned on its head. Talk about power left on the table.

Lesson #3 followed. Jesus gave the implications of His non-use of power for all those who follow Him.⁴

Here, for the first time, Jesus lays out to those who have received the gift of eternal life what is involved in being His "bulls-eye" disciples.

The power of powerless disciples (v. 23)

Coming after Jesus (v. 23)

⁴ This is a glimpse at the cost of the incarnation for Jesus. So, of course, it is hazardous to follow such a man. Judea rejected him (John 5:18); Galilee cast Him out (John 6:66); Gadara begged Him to leave its district (Matt. 8:34); Samaria refused Him lodging (Luke 9:53); earth will not have Him (Matt. 27:23); Heaven finally forsakes Him as He takes the sin of the world upon Himself (Matt. 27:46)

[23] And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross⁵ daily, and follow Me.

"DENY [YOURSELF]"

Disciples are to deny their own desires if those desires get in the way of following Jesus.⁶ Following Jesus is always the main thing.

Setting aside something that might be satisfying SO THAT we can satisfy the grander glory of following Jesus is at the heart of following Jesus.

On any given day, a disciple might deny himself "down time" and instead serve someone in need when he's really tired. Or she might deny herself money to help a loved one through a crisis. A disciple might deny himself sleep to sit with a friend whose world has just broken.

You will "**come after**" Jesus by denying yourself when you serve your family, your neighbors, your friends.

Disciples are living for something grander than the satisfaction of "right-now" desires. They expend energy to serve in Jesus' Name even when they don't feel like they have any reserves left.

Jesus continued with another comment to would-be disciples: ***"Take up your cross daily."***

"TAKE UP YOUR CROSS DAILY"

⁵ This is the first mention of the cross in Luke.

⁶ Toward the end of this chapter, a man told Jesus that he was willing to follow Jesus. The Lord used the vocabulary of self-denial to make sure that this man knew what he was getting himself into. **[57] As they were going on the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."** **[58] And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."** Jesus was warning him: "Really? Are you prepared to forego creature comforts if that is what it takes to follow Me? That's what being a disciple means."

Everyone listening to Jesus here would have understood what He was talking about when He made mention of a cross. Crucifixion was a common method of capital punishment used by the Romans in first-century Palestine.

There are records of mass crucifixions in Jesus' day where hundreds of people were crucified at the same time. So, a vivid image would have come to the minds of Jesus' disciples as He spoke. The image was of a death march.⁷

Jesus may have intended for His followers to be prepared for crucifixion. I suspect something else was mainly in view.

His disciples had all seen a man take up his cross and carry it to the place of crucifixion. What they had never seen was anyone coming back from crucifixion.

So, ***“take up [your] cross daily”*** refers to starting a journey from which there is no return. No turning back, no matter what.⁸

Finally, Jesus said, ***“Follow Me.”***

“FOLLOW ME”

Taking the verse as a whole, Jesus was saying that if we want to ***“come after”*** Jesus (which means ***“follow”***), we must...***“follow”*** Jesus.

While denying self, without ever turning back, we follow wherever He leads, one day at a time, one step at a time.

There is no telling where our Leader might lead. He might lead us anywhere. It's up to Him to lead. It's up to us to follow.

Conclusion:

⁷ The cross was familiar to people in Palestine. To mention it (as here) would have brought to mind what “electric chair” does to our minds.

⁸ We are to view ourselves as traveling the same road Jesus traveled as He walked from the Roman Praetorium to Golgotha carrying His cross.

You'll notice “The Great Omission” in what Jesus said to His followers here at the end. (Luke 9:18-23)

What He said would take a while to sink in, but it eventually would ring true for these men that very often, following Jesus will not have them taking the path to power.

From the discussion of His identity as the Messiah and the command for silence about that identity, to the prediction of His own death, to telling them what it means to be His disciple, He said nothing about power.

Not a word about casting out demons, raising the dead, healing the sick, or preaching.

The timing of Jesus' words to His disciples was perfect for what He wanted them to learn.

They had just experienced power on their missions trip and at the feeding of the five thousand. Here in this last scene, Jesus taught them that His way to power often involves setting power aside.

That is, after all, exactly what He did. He released His grip on His own power and submitted to suffering, rejection, and death. From that, God produced the power of the resurrection.

Yes, Jesus wants us to be His partners in meeting human need and He will provide us with resources to bring blessing to needy people in His name.

But it is in self-denial and cross-carrying that we become powerful, impactful people for Him.

The most powerful people I have ever known have been those who have lived the way Jesus describes here.

- They deny themselves legitimate good things to serve people in need in Jesus' Name.
- They don't promote themselves. They could. Instead, they promote Jesus.
- They may be brand new in Jesus, but they are taking their first next steps.

- They may be weak and weary, elderly or frail or compromised, but they keep on taking next steps with Jesus.

Jesus longs to do powerful things through you, His disciple.⁹

He is calling you into deeper following, because the self-denying, cross-carrying disciple is the disciple through whom His power flows.¹⁰

⁹ After placing a vision of being used in powerful ways in the lives of others to the glory of God, Jesus put the disciples on a learning track designed to expand that vision. His curriculum included lessons at every stage where their categories were exploded, their beliefs challenged, their capacities enlarged, their prejudices confronted, their often-twisted actions and attitudes reprovved. After placing a vision for ministry before them, Jesus put the disciples in situation after situation where their shortcomings would become manifest and where they had to be corrected. They had to CHANGE if they were to be fit conduits for God's power, sharp instruments He could use. Will it be any less the case for us?

¹⁰ One of my favorite books is [A Tale of Three Kings](#), by Gene Edwards. (I read it a couple of times a year. It's very short.) Like the passages in the Bible we've seen today, the book is about power. In Part I, we learn about the young pre-king David and his dealings with the first king of Israel, Saul. In Part II, we look at the older King David and his dealings with his own son, Absalom, who tried to overthrow David. I have learned a lot about the uses and abuses of power from Edwards' book, and I recommend it to you. The thesis of the book is that, for Jesus followers today, as for Old Testament kings, the power of God to make great impact for God and His kingdom is *available* - but *dangerous*. Edwards points out that it is possible to possess the power of God...while throwing spears at young shepherds, plotting to kill, and even consulting witches. [A Tale of Three Kings](#) brings us face to face with power, rightly and wrongly used.