

How To Grow Deeper in Your Spiritual Walk

I. The Discipline of Spiritual Priorities and Focus

7 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,

29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”

30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

33 Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

34 “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

35 Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

The disciples are still very green. They have so much to learn from Christ - so far to go before they are ready to take the reigns of the NT church. But they are learning to trust Christ. The disciples returned from their grocery shopping trip to see Jesus talking with this Samaritan woman, and John emphasizes their restraint when he says, “But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” This showed that the disciples were at least learning not to challenge Jesus, even though they were dying of curiosity. Very clearly, He was the teacher, they were the students.

But then we see glaring evidence of their naiveté. They tried to fix Jesus a sandwich. After all, they went into town to get food, He must want food. And this is where Jesus gives them their first lesson in developing their spiritual focus.

They didn’t understand Jesus didn’t send them to get food for Himself. He sent them to get out of His way so He could minister to the Samaritan woman. But the disciples were oblivious, so they are encouraging Him to eat. And this is when Christ reveals two important truths to them, two truths that should help form the very foundation of their ministry.

A. Truth #1: Matters of the Kingdom are always the first priority.

“I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

First of all, we are amused that once again John emphasizes Christ’s use of double-meaning in the words He chooses. When He does this, he always leaves his listening audience confused. Once again, we refer back to his double-meaning use of the term “born again”, and how he just got done giving a double meaning to the word water when speaking with the woman at the well. Now he uses a hidden meaning for the word “food” that confuses his disciples, and their predictable response is, “Did someone else bring him some food?” The disciples are looking

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very clumsy at this point. They just haven't learned how to tune into the spiritual side. They haven't developed their spiritual ears for hearing what Jesus is saying. They haven't developed their spiritual eyes to discern the circumstances surrounding them.

Then Jesus throws another cryptic statement their way.

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

Here is what Jesus wanted his disciples to learn. There are times when the pressing matters of ministry will take precedence over physical needs and conveniences.

This is the lesson we all need to keep at the forefront of our lives. We need to learn how to keep God's priorities above our needs and wants. Here is a prime example. We recently asked each of you to pledge two months worth of double tithes. We have had a wonderful response to this plea, but I know what that means for many of you. You have to re-prioritize in order to make that happen. You put some personal projects on hold in order to take care of the business of the church. God takes notice of your priorities and He honors that.

Jesus demonstrated that meeting that woman at the well and bringing her to a saving knowledge of the Messiah was more important than going into town to buy food. God is not impressed by people who treat themselves to anything and everything they want, then dig around in the bottom of their pockets for any leftovers they might be willing to drop into the offering plate. God doesn't want leftovers. He doesn't want you to burn yourself out on your own pursuits then say, "I just don't have much time left to give in service to the Lord. I am too busy with other things." He is looking for the person who adjusts their own calendar to take care of Kingdom needs, then returns to their own schedule after the things of God have been taken care of. The disciples were hungry. They followed their physical needs and appetites. They went searching for food. I can't really say I blame them. They were just doing what normal people do. But Christ was molding them, shaping them, training them to start thinking with spiritual understanding, start looking with spiritual eyes, start listening with spiritual ears.

And notice, the woman at the well left her water pot behind and returned into town to tell everyone she had found the Messiah. She also demonstrated an immediate realignment of priorities when spreading the message of the Messiah was suddenly more important than fetching water. She didn't even bother to load the water bottle up and take it with her while she went back to town.

B. Truth #2: The Time is Now – The Harvest is Ripe

There is something about Kingdom work that makes it entirely unique – urgency. Everything we do in Kingdom work is too little, too late for someone. Jesus dropped a bomb on his disciples. He was not preparing them for a work that will one day need to be done. He was preparing them for a work that is already in progress. The harvest is ripe. Some of the fruit is rotting in the fields. The laborers are too few. The need is now. We can't get people saved fast enough. We can't get people disciple and up to speed fast enough. There is an urgency unlike

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anything else in this world. You can methodically plan your retirement. You can methodically plan to expand your business. You can make careful plans about your future and how you want to move from renting an apartment into owning your own home. All those things are legitimate projects that deserve careful planning. But there is an urgency in the Kingdom that is totally different from all of these things. Ministry opportunities are here, now, today. Every day we are unable to do ministry, it costs us souls. We are fighting the clock every minute of every day.

Having a sense of urgency in ministry defines how you approach ministry. Lacking a sense of urgency in ministry kills the ministry. A church without a sense of urgency is nothing but a social club and is dead on the vine. A minister who preaches without a sense of urgency is nothing but an orator.

C. The Real Law of Sowing and Reaping

36 Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

The entire thought of these verses is to impress on us that we are all part of something much bigger than ourselves. A successful harvest takes time and teams. The disciples would at this point reap because others had sown. But they themselves would sow so others could reap. There is wisdom in God spreading the mechanics of a successful harvest out over a broad spectrum of workers. We need each other. We do not labor in a bubble. We are not all growing our own individual gardens with our own system of planting, watering, and harvesting. We are all laboring in the common field.

1. There will be no season of harvest without a season of planting.
2. Harvesting is more glamorous than planting.
3. Harvesters must remain humble for reaping where they did not sow. Sowers must remain faithful and not get discouraged for laboring where there is no immediate gratification of fruit for one’s labors.

II. There is More To This Than Signs And Wonders

The last part of chapter 4 deals with the healing of the royal official’s son. John calls this the second sign Jesus performed and it happened back in Cana, where the first sign occurred, the turning of water into wine. This is why we call chapters 2-4 the Cana cycle.

In this story a royal official hears Jesus is returning to Cana and went to meet Jesus, begging him to come with him and heal his son who was evidently dying. To complete the story, Jesus does not physically with the man, but pronounces the young man healed and sends the official back home. When the official returns home, he does indeed find that his son recovered about 1:00 p.m. that day, at the very time he had brought his need to Jesus.

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There are a couple of interesting details in this story that need some clarification.

A. First, this is where John includes the statement by Jesus that a prophet is not without honor except in his own country.

This has created some difficulty in this passage, because right after Jesus proclaims prophets don't get any respect among their own people, John tells us the Galileans gladly received Jesus. But there are several possible explanations. For one, if we look at Jesus's continued ministry in this area, he was not always as well received as he was this day.

Second, we might consider that John felt Jesus referred to Judea as his home country, not Galilee.

Third, we might compare how Jesus was received in Samaria with how he was received in Galilee. And that leads us to the next puzzling statement Jesus made in this story.

B. The second difficulty is when Jesus responded to the royal official's request to heal his son by saying, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe." It was a bit of a reprimand.

But comparing how the Galileans responded to Jesus with how the Samaritans responded, we see that the Galileans were motivated by the signs and wonders Jesus performed. The royal official may have come to Jesus as coming to some sort of magician, rather than coming to the Messiah. He came like many people do, for what they can get from Him rather than for who He is.

The Samaritans came because they believed on Him as the Messiah. They were not drawn to him because of miracles he performed. They came to Him because they believed He was their Messiah.

The applicable point that must be made for us today is this: we still have people who are mesmerized by the supernatural. They seek after signs and wonders. They are as shallow as a sidewalk rain puddle.

From the very onset of Christ's earthly ministry, there were two kinds of followers – those who followed Christ for what He did, and those who followed Him for who He was. That was the difference between how the Samaritans received Christ and how the Galileans received Him. That is the same choice people have to make today. Those who are always looking for something sensational really have no devotion to Christ beyond what they think He can do for them.

John makes the case again and again in his gospel that Jesus is the Son of God, then challenges the readers, "What are you going to do with Him?"