



Growing into Christ

Readings, Meditations, and Prayers

T. M. Moore

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Readings, Meditations, and Prayers
Jonathan Edwards, Aelred, David Dickson, Robert E. Coleman on
Making Disciples

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Foreword

The meditations that follow aim at encouraging and improving your work as a disciple-maker in the Kingdom of God.

All believers are called to make disciples, and every one of us has a sphere of influence – a Personal Mission Field – to which we are daily sent as Jesus was sent to the world in His day (Jn. 20.21). We are called to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12), and no small part of this calling is the work we do in growing into Jesus, and helping others to do the same.

Each morning and evening reading includes a selection from Scripture, an excerpt from one of the great Christian disciple-makers of the past, a question for reflection, and prayer prompt to guide you in bringing the focus of the meditation before the Lord in prayer. Our guides for this *Morning and Evening* series will be Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167), David Dickson (1754-1820), and Robert E. Coleman (1928-).

We hope you will use this book faithfully for 28 days, and that you will share it with others, challenge them to work through these meditations, and join with them to discuss what you're learning and to encourage one another to keep on growing into Christ.

For more resources on making disciples – books, prayer guides, and our free online course, *Disciple-Making in Small Groups* – visit our website at www.ailbe.org. May the Lord bless you richly as you undertake this 28-day adventure of becoming more deeply immersed in the work of prayer.

T. M. Moore

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Day 1: Morning

Spiritual Knowledge

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Matthew 16.17

"Mortal men are capable of imparting the knowledge of human arts and sciences, and skill in temporal affairs. God is the author of such knowledge by those means: *flesh and blood* is employed as the *mediate* or *second* cause of it: he conveys it by the power and influence of natural means. But this spiritual knowledge spoken of in the text, is what God is the author of, and none else: he *reveals it*, and *flesh and blood reveals it not*. He imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural causes, as he does in other knowledge."¹

What is involved in growing into our Lord Jesus Christ? That every believer is *commanded* to grow into Him is beyond dispute. All the apostles urged the pursuit of maturity in Christ. Only as we grow in Christ, and are transformed increasingly into His image, will we live as His witnesses and bring glory to God in all we are and do. But how do we *achieve* such consistent growth in the Lord? The great Puritan pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, strongly believed that Christians must be encouraged and instructed in the discipline of being *immediately* taught of the Lord. Only from Him can we receive that spiritual knowledge which weans us from the world and binds us to Him in love. Only God can do this, but we must understand *how* He works to mature us in the Lord. What is our part in this?

Do you experience this direct instruction of the Lord in your walk with Him? How does this come to you? How do you know it is of the Lord?

Lord, today, let me make progress in You, in knowing You, enjoying You, and...

¹ All quotations from Jonathan Edwards, "*A Divine and Supernatural Light*," in Edward Hickman, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. Two (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995)*, pp. 12 ff.

Day 1: Evening

Beholding the Glory

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3.18

“He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it. He does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God’s holiness. There is not only a speculatively judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is on account of the beauty of this divine attribute.”

Edwards is here writing about what the Puritans referred to as “experimental” knowledge – the knowledge of God that goes beyond mere intellectual understanding and assent, to penetrate more deeply into one’s soul with the *sense* or *experience* of God, and of His holiness and loveliness. The holiness and loveliness of God become something not just to *understand* but to *experience* or *partake of* (2 Pet. 1.4), so that by doing so, we are deeply affected and increasingly transformed into the image of Him Whom we are thus coming to *know*. We are truly growing *into* the Lord when knowing and loving Him beyond mere knowledge is our daily pursuit and attainment (Eph. 3.14-19. This should be the goal of everyone who is seeking to grow in our Lord Jesus Christ. Such *experimental* knowledge of God brings about in us a love that exceeds understanding and exerts transforming power for the glory of God in the lives of those who experience it. This, Edwards insisted, is the privilege and calling of every true believer in Jesus Christ, and the goal of our disciple-making.

*How would you explain the concept of “experimental” knowledge to a new believer?
How do you experience this yourself?*

Lord, as I look back on this day, thinking about You, I...

Day 2: Morning

The Pleasure of Knowing

You will show me the path of life;

In Your presence is fullness of joy;

At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16.11

“When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension. It is implied in a person’s being heartily sensible of the loveliness of a thing, that the idea of it is pleasant to his soul; which is a far different thing from having a rational opinion that it is excellent.”

Edwards does not deny the importance of the mind in Christian growth – in “having a rational opinion” about the Lord and the things of faith. But he wants us to move beyond that, to the place where our *hearts* are more deeply engaged with the Lord, in knowing, loving, and delighting in Him in the depths of our being. Why do so many Christians find the study of Scripture, Christian doctrine, and other matters of the life of faith so tedious and, yes, even boring? Doubtless it is because they have never been taught how to learn Christ (Eph. 4.17-24) in any way other than a merely intellectual one, and their brains can only entertain so much knowledge. But when knowing the Lord becomes *pleasurable*, because in *knowing* Him we are *engaging His glory*, *entering His presence*, and *partaking of Him*, then study and learning will be a delight. And when study and learning are a delight, sustained Christian growth will follow. The challenge for church leaders, therefore, is to lead people into *that* depth of knowing Christ, where God Himself meets, teaches, and transforms them.

Is study a delight for you? Do you relish hours spent meditating on Christian truth and seeking the presence of the Lord?

Today, Lord, give me an opportunity to...

Day 2: Evening

Delighting in Doctrine

*Unless Your law had been my delight,
I would then have perished in my affliction.
I will never forget Your precepts,
For by them You have given me life. Psalm 119.92, 93*

“The mind of man is naturally full of prejudices against divine truth. It is full of enmity against the doctrines of the gospel; which is a disadvantage to those arguments that prove their truth, and causes them to lose their force upon the mind. But when a person has discovered to him the divine excellency of Christian doctrines, this destroys the enmity, removes those prejudices, sanctifies the reason, and causes it to lie open to the force of arguments for their truth.”

Only God can open people to the truth of the Gospel. This suggests that, at the least, our work of evangelism and making disciples should be bathed in and supported by prayer in every aspect. Unless God works, no one’s mind will be open to the Gospel. Unless God works, none of His people will grow to hunger and delight in His Word. We have a role to play, of course, in our own growth in the Lord – seeking Him, waiting on Him, feeding on His Word, walking in His Spirit, and so forth. And we have a role in stimulating our brethren in the Lord to grow in Him as well. But it all begins in prayer. If we want to delight in the Word of God, and in growing in Christ; and if we want those we serve to do the same, then we must pray. As Paul prayed fervently for those in his charge (cf. Eph. 1.15-23), so let us pray for the people to whom we have been sent to minister the Word of God, that God might open their minds and hearts to His truth, so that they begin to delight in it.

Spend some time today and for the rest of the week, praying through Ephesians 1.15-23, inserting the names of those leaders and others whom you are training and equipping.

This evening, Lord, I pray particularly for...

Day 3: Morning

It is the Spirit Who Gives Life

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” John 6.63

“The mind cannot see the excellency of any doctrine, unless that doctrine be first in the mind; but seeing the excellency of the doctrine may be immediately from the Spirit of God; though the conveying of the doctrine or proposition itself may be by the word. So that the notions which are the subject-matter of this light, are conveyed to the mind by the word of God; but that due sense of the heart, wherein this light formally consists, is immediately by the Spirit of God. As for instance, the notion that there is a Christ, and that Christ is holy and gracious, is conveyed to the mind by the word of God; but the sense of the excellency of Christ by reason of that holiness and grace, is nevertheless immediately the work of the Spirit.”

The Spirit teaches the deep things of God and gives life to those who hear God’s Word (1 Cor. 2.12, 13). Is it possible that the Holy Spirit has a preferred way of teaching these deep truths? And if so, does that not suggest that we who are called to teach in His place and power should do everything we can to discover His wonted ways of instruction, and to bend *our* way of teaching to conform to *HIS*? We have become trapped in an ecclesiastical culture which takes as the default mode of helping people to grow in Christ, to assemble them in rooms, either in a circle or with rows of chairs, and subject them to a program of information and fellowship, perhaps supplemented by a book or study guide. But, as we shall see, the Holy Spirit prefers other, more personal, pastoral, and missional approaches to growing disciples into the image of Christ. It’s not likely our existing church culture can accommodate these. Are we open to learning about learning all over again?

How confident are you that your approach to preaching, teaching, and making disciples is “in step” with how the Spirit prefers to teach?

As a disciple, Lord, I should be learning more about You every day. Today, help me to focus on...

Day 3: Evening

A Spiritual Sight of Christ

“Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” John 13.16, 17

“This doctrine may well put us upon examining ourselves, whether we have ever had this divine light into our souls. If there be such a thing, doubtless it is of great importance whether we have thus been taught by the Spirit of God; whether the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, hath shined unto us, giving us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; whether we have seen the Son, and believed on him, or have that faith of gospel-doctrines which arises from a spiritual sight of Christ.”

It will be impossible for us to lead those we teach into the presence of the glory of Christ, so that they delight in doctrine and find deep fulfillment and pleasure in learning Him, unless we ourselves are in the practice of engaging this divine and supernatural light. Put another way, unless *seeing* Jesus, and *growing into* Him, defines our daily walk, we won't have much to give others to help them grow in the Lord. The challenge to us is to seek the face of Jesus by every available spiritual means, that we may then, with first-hand experience and glowing reports, urge and lead those we teach to enter into His presence and glory as well. For here, before the face of Jesus Christ, is where real transformation takes place (2 Cor. 4.6).

How are you thinking about improving your own approach to learning Christ, so that you know more of this divine and supernatural light each day?

You reveal Yourself in Your Word, Lord, as well as in the creation around. Today I was able to see You in...

Day 4: Morning

Conformed to the Gospel

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus... Ephesians 4.20, 21

“This knowledge will wean from the world, and raise the inclination to heavenly things. It will turn the heart to God as the fountain of good, and to choose him for the only portion. This light, and this only, will bring the soul to a saving close with Christ. It conforms the heart to the gospel, mortifies its enmity and opposition against the scheme of salvation therein revealed; it causes the heart to embrace the joyful tidings, and entirely to adhere to, and acquiesce in the revelation of Christ as our Saviour; it causes the whole soul to accord and sympathize with it, admitting it with entire credit and respect, cleaving to it with full inclination and affection; and it effectually disposes the soul to give up itself entirely to Christ.”

Only true spiritual knowledge can draw a person on in his or her walk with the Lord. Such knowledge leads us to love the things of Christ more than the world, and to aspire to Kingdom and heavenly greatness as our *modus vivendi*. Such knowledge comes only in the very presence of Christ, through the ministry of His Word and Spirit. And such knowledge comes to the people of God as faithful shepherds and teachers live, instruct, pray, exhort, and lead those in their care into the presence of the risen and reigning Christ. As we think, talk, and teach about growing in the Lord, let us have clearly in mind this overriding objective: That we *connect people with Christ*, lead them by the hand, placing theirs in His, bringing them into His presence and glory, as co-workers with the Spirit of God, so that His divine and supernatural light penetrates their souls, enlivens their hope, kindles great joy, and expands the horizons of their walk with and work for Him. If by our teaching and disciple-making we can do this much, the Lord Jesus will take it from there.

Would you say that you are consistently seeing people come into contact with this divine and supernatural light? Is this a matter of daily prayer with you?

Draw me into Your presence now, Lord, and let me...

Day 4: Evening

The Touchstone and Goal

Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.
Philemon 20

Spiritual Friendship

Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1167)

“For what can one say about friendship that is more sublime, more truthful, more useful, than that friendship will be shown to be formed in Christ, advanced according to Christ, and perfected by Christ?”²

Aelred was abbot of the Cistercian monastery at Rievaulx in Lincolnshire, England. He wrote to encourage the monks in his care, and those in the five daughter monasteries he oversaw, concerning their calling as followers of Christ. Jesus called His disciples “friends.” All who are growing as disciples benefit from and learn the art of friendship. Friendship is a source of joy, a means of support, a buttress in times of trial and uncertainty, and a resting place of peace and renewal. Friendship in Jesus Christ is true friendship, because those who, like Paul and Philemon, are growing as friends of the Lord have a focus, fount, and future which goes beyond merely personal interests and needs. Jesus Christ is the Touchstone and Goal of all true friendships. True friendship is friendship *in* Christ, and *into* Him; and all believers (not just pastors) need such true and spiritual friends.

Does your ministry encourage friendship among the people of God – friendship into Jesus Christ? In what specific ways?

Tonight, Lord, I thank You for the friends You have put into my life, especially...

² All quotations from Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, tr. By Mark F. Williams (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 1994, 2002).

Day 5: Morning

Guardians of the Soul

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13.17

“...my friend must be the guardian of our mutual love, or even of my very soul, so that he will preserve in faithful silence all its secrets, and whatever he sees in it that is flawed he will correct or endure with all his strength. When I rejoice, he will rejoice; when I grieve, he will grieve with me; he will consider as his own everything that his friend experiences.”

Pastors and elders are called to watch over the souls of God’s people – to be their true friends in the Lord. Soul friendship is the context in which we make disciples who are growing into the Lord Jesus, who know Him as that One Who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18.24). It takes friendship from those who care for our souls to help us grow as friends of Jesus. Yet most people in churches today feel distant from their leaders. They don’t think anybody really knows or cares about them among the leadership of the church, so they seek their friendships within small groups or Bible studies or other church activities. If the elders and pastors of our churches do not watch over the souls of God’s people, in ways such as Aelred describes, in what sense can they be said to be fulfilling their calling from the Lord?

What arrangement does your church provide to enable your pastors and elders to watch over the souls of God’s people?

Whom will You bring into my path today, Father? Let me be a faithful friend and guardian of their souls by...

Day 5: Evening

Preparing for Friendship

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. 1 Timothy 4.16

“Thus it is the mark of a virtuous mind always to meditate upon lofty and difficult things, so that it either attains or more clearly understands and recognizes that which it desires: so we should not believe that a man has made but little progress when he has recognized virtue and learned from that how far he is from virtue. However, the Christian ought never despair of attaining any virtue, since his ears echo daily with that saying from the gospel, ‘Seek and you shall find.’”

True friendship requires virtue – Christian virtue. Friends in the Lord love one another, trust one another, and depend on and confide in one another. But virtue comes only through the contemplation of Him Who is all virtue, even our Lord Jesus Christ. We are striving to grow *into* Him, and to help others grow *into* Him as well (Col. 3.1-3; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). Without a clear and compelling vision of the exalted Christ, coupled with regular communion with Him through various spiritual disciplines, it is impossible to make progress in virtue, or in friendship and watching over the soul of another. But we also need to know where we stand in relation to that holy and glorious vision. By keeping a close watch over our own souls, we’ll be in a better position to help others grow into Jesus in theirs.

What is your practice of keeping a close watch over your soul? How do you determine where you need to be growing more as a friend of Jesus?

Holy Spirit, search and know my soul, and show me...

Day 6: Morning

True Friends

So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 1 Thessalonians 2.8

“...we say that only they are friends to whom we are not afraid to entrust our hearts and everything that is in them – to those, in turn, who are bound to us by the same law of faith and security.”

Disciples learn to trust the Lord, and one of the ways they do so is by learning to trust one another. True friends share the kind of affection which leads them to give themselves to one another in a relationship of mutual trust and love. No one can be everyone’s friend. We must, as Aelred explained, be prepared to exercise good will toward all people, “For the law of grace compels us to receive not only friends, but also enemies, with heartfelt esteem.” But it’s different with friends. To them we give ourselves, without fear they will betray or despise us. And from them we receive the same. Such spiritual friendship brings to expression the oneness of the Spirit and strengthens the bonds of unity among us (Eph. 4.3), thus enhancing our experience of and witness to the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 17.21). And by practicing such trust with soul friends, we learn to trust our heavenly Friend more and more.

Do you have any true, spiritual friends from other congregations? Or with pastors of other churches in your community? Should you?

Today, Lord, I will reach out to my true friends by...

Day 6: Evening

Love not Iniquity

You who love the LORD, hate evil! Psalm 97.10

“Worldly people falsely assume for themselves the outstanding name of friendship if they base their bond upon an agreement in vices, since he who does not love is not a friend. But he who loves iniquity does not love his fellow man, for ‘he who loves iniquity does not love, but rather hates his own soul.’ And certainly he who does not love his own soul will in no way be capable of loving the soul of another.”

If we cannot be friends of the world and friends of God (Jms. 4.4), so we may not be friends with sin and true friends to others. If we are friends with sin, we do violence to our own souls, thus undermining our ability to love and trust others at the most crucial point. Moreover, if we harbor sin in our hearts, God will not hear our prayers (Ps. 66.18). Cutting ourselves off from fellowship with Him (and, hence, the source of friendship’s needed virtues, Is. 59.1, 2), we walk a slippery slope that leads to more peril (Ps. 73.18). Friendship and discipleship cannot flourish where we refuse to hate sin – hate it so much that we daily strive to eradicate it from our own souls, and are ready to help our friends do the same. We cannot love others except in the same way we love ourselves. And if loving ourselves means tolerating sin, then we will tolerate it in our friends as well. And this will be detrimental, rather than helpful, to their souls, and to their growing into the Lord.

How do you encourage your church leaders to practice vigilance against sin?

What sin do I need to hate more fervently, Lord? Show me now, and help me to...

Day 7: Morning

For Mutual Edification

Let all things be done for edification. 1 Corinthians 14:26

“For spiritual friendship, which is what we mean by true friendship, should be desired not with a view to any worldly good, nor for any reason extrinsic to itself, but from the worthiness of its own nature, and the feeling of the human heart, so that it offers no advantage or reward other than itself...For in this true friendship one makes progress by bettering oneself, and one bears fruit by experiencing the enjoyment of this increasing degree of perfection. And so spiritual friendship is born among good people through the similarity of their characters, goals, and habits in life.”

Friendship – caring for and edifying one another – is the framework Jesus taught for making disciples. But we can't be a friend to anyone if we're tolerating sin in our souls and not working diligently to grow into the Lord. As we submit to God's Word and Spirit, we meet the Lord in His glory, and Christ is formed in us (2 Cor. 3:12-18). But this is not merely for our own advantage. We benefit by experiencing a greater degree of the glory of the Lord; and this equips us to share that glory with others, through mutual friendship and the encouragement and example of love. When friends are growing in the Lord, they reinforce and extend one another in ways wonderful to experience and see. Only God can bring growth in our lives (1 Cor. 3:7). And He grows us, and uses us to grow others, where each of us is bettering himself and bearing fruit through the glory of the Lord.

Would you describe your work of disciple-making as an adventure of growing in the glory of the Lord? Why or why not?

Father, show me today any areas where I need to grow. Then help me...

Day 7: Evening

Linked in the Lord

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6.1, 2

“Not only is God self-sufficient; he is himself the sufficiency of all created things, granting some mere existence, granting others sentience, and granting still others knowledge, while himself remaining the cause of all existing things, the life of all sentient things, and the knowledge of all knowledgeable things. And so God Himself, as the Highest Nature, established all natures, put all things in their proper place, separately distributed all things to their proper times. But because his eternal reason demanded it, he wished all his creatures to be joined together in peace, and for community to exist between them. And thus all his creatures are allotted a certain vestige of unity from him who is supremely and purely one.”

Friendships bear witness to the oneness of God and His purpose for all of creation – that all creation should be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5.17-21). If our disciple-making were conducted more in a context of spiritual friendship, our whole church might demonstrate more of the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3). Then our oneness would be more conspicuous to the surrounding community, thus enhancing our witness for the Lord (Jn. 17.21). True spiritual friendships witness to the reality of God, and of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By bearing one another’s burdens, we demonstrate the dependence of all creation on God’s purposes, presence, power, and will; and we testify to the true *joy* and *peace* which can be found in union with Him alone. Think how such friendships, actively encouraged and pursued in the context of making disciples, might transform a local church and its presence in the community!

Meditate on the last sentence above. Jot down whatever ideas come to you concerning the potential for your church to impact your community through true spiritual friendships.

Tomorrow, Lord, let me work at unity in the Spirit with...

Day 8: Morning

Nothing Sweeter

*Two are better than one,
Because they have a good reward for their labor.
For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls,
For he has no one to help him up.* Ecclesiastes 4.9, 10

“For in human affairs there is no goal that is holier than friendship, nothing more useful, nothing more difficult to find, nothing that is sweeter to experience, nothing more enjoyable to maintain.”

It can be difficult for pastors to make and enjoy true spiritual friendship with members of their congregation. Hopefully, there will be a leader here, an elder there, or a mature older friend who will stick with the pastor and treat his soul like his own. Pray that God will give you such friends, brethren. But pastors should look beyond their own churches to other pastors in the community. If we can make friends with other pastors, and enjoy one another as Aelred suggests, this will affect our approach to making disciples, and might be a solid first step for our congregations in learning to pursue sweet oneness in the Lord. As ministers reach out in friendships with one another, and those friendships begin to be expressed within and among their churches, the unity of the Body of Christ will become more visible. And that will certainly get the community’s attention, and open new possibilities for the Gospel (Jn. 17.21).

Talk with a couple of local pastors about this idea of spiritual friendship. Do they seem open? Interested? Would they be willing to pray with you about this?

I want to be a true spiritual friend to someone, Lord, so today...

Day 8: Evening

Headless Beasts?

For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. Philemon 7

“A human being without a friend is like a beast: for he lacks someone with whom he can share his joy in prosperity and his sadness in adversity, to whom he may unburden his mind when he is preoccupied, with whom he may talk whenever he has had a particularly sublime or illuminating insight...That person is completely alone who has no friend.”

St. Brigid (d. 525 AD) said that a man without a spiritual friend is like a man without a head. He can't think clearly, can't see the world as it really is, and doesn't even know what's wrong with him. He has no one else to understand his struggles and help him along in the journey into Christlikeness. Aelred says that those who have no friends are like beasts – competing for everything, wary of everyone, consumed only with, well, consuming. We are made for community, and community begins at the personal level, where soul friends challenge, encourage, hold accountable, edify, and lead one another to grow in the Lord. True spiritual friends care about our souls and seek, like Philemon, to bring refreshment and renewal to our hearts, that we might know joy and comfort. This is what it means to be a true spiritual friend, and this is the pattern for disciple-making the Lord through the Scriptures commends.

To whom are you a true spiritual friend like this? What is keeping you from being a soul friend with others?

Thank You for this day, Lord, and for my spiritual friends. Help me to improve tomorrow in...

Day 9: Morning

The Path to Perfection

*As iron sharpens iron,
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. Proverbs 27.17*

“...friendship is a path that leads very close to the perfection which consists of the enjoyment and knowledge of God, such that a man who is a friend of man is made into a friend of God, according to what the Savior said in the gospel: ‘Now I will not call you servants, but my friends.’”

Two important aspects of spiritual friendship are glimpsed here. First, true friendship focuses on God, on knowing Him, dwelling in His presence, and becoming like Him in all the perfections of virtue and knowledge. The goal of friendship is the goal of discipleship: to increase into Christ in every way. True spiritual friends thus sharpen one another as image-bearers of God and Christ. And, second, such a project is a path, a journey. True friendships are going somewhere together. They have intermediate goals and objectives, and take stock of their progress. Friends discover new ways of encouraging one another in the journey. They carry each other when discouragement or weariness befalls. They enjoy the journey together by enjoying together the presence of the Lord. Such friends exude a stronger presence of the Lord Jesus than one of us journeying alone.

Talk with a close friend about these two aspects of spiritual friendship. In what ways are you sharpening one another according to these two criteria?

Today, I want to encourage my spiritual friends in their walk with You, Lord. Show me how to...

Day 9: Evening
Into Christ

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3.14

“And so in friendship are joined honesty and agreeableness, truth and pleasantness, sweetness and will, affection and action. All of these qualities come together in Christ, they are advanced through Christ, and in Christ they are perfected.”

In the Gospel of John, the apostle describes those who have come to Jesus as believing *into* Him. Theirs is no mere superficial faith, but goes to the very heart of Jesus, and resides there. Those who believe *into* Jesus (Greek: *eis*) are those who understand what Paul was writing about in our text: That the goal of our faith is *in* Jesus, in growing *into* Him, so that we are immersed in and surrounded by Him, and are being transformed into His image. All our hope of joy, purpose, meaning, and life is *in* Christ Jesus, and we are growing *into* Him, helping and encouraging each other, each step of the way. Friends help one another in becoming disciples of the Lord by pressing on together toward *that* prize, the high calling of knowing Christ, abiding in Him, being clothed with Him, walking with Him, showing and declaring Him to the world. This is the real prize of friendship, and the goal of disciple-making.

How might you improve some of your friendships so that each of you became more consistently focused on this prize?

Thank You, Lord, that today I saw progress toward the prize in...

Day 10: Morning

Willing to Die?

Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.” Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.” John 13.37, 38

“Christ himself has set up a sure goal for friendship by saying, ‘Greater love has no man than this, than that a man lay down his life for his friends.’ Behold, how far love must be extended among friends – to the point that they are willing to die for one another!”

At dinner with a couple of pastor friends some time ago, the topic of persecution came up, at which time one of the pastors opined that he was not quite certain whether he would be willing to lay down his life for the Lord Jesus. He said he hadn’t thought about it, but he hoped he would – he just didn’t know. I was disturbed by this report. It seems to me this is a question we should have resolved, if only in our minds, shortly after coming to faith in Christ. If we are not willing to lay down our lives for Jesus, we certainly will not lay down our lives for a mere mortal. Love for Christ, to the point of being willing to die for Him, is foundational to true friendship. If we will betray the Lord, Who died for us – by reticence or silence or catering to this or that group or individual – what will keep us from betraying those who consider us their true friends? But if, like Jesus, we are willing to die for the faith, then we will give our lives as well to those God has called us to shepherd in His flock (Jn. 10.11). Such self-denial is the mark of true discipleship (Jn. 13.1-35).

Have you settled the question of whether you would be willing to die for Jesus? Talk with a soul friend about this question.

Today, Lord, I know I will need to lay down my life for You by...

Day 10: Evening

Friends in Heart and Mind

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed... Galatians 2.11

“...affection without reason is the sort of attraction mere beasts feel for each other; among humans it is given to forming attachments that are in many respects illicit – indeed, it cannot tell the difference between the licit and the illicit. However, we understand that often affection precedes friendship, but it ought never to be followed unless it is led by reason, moderated by a sense of honor, and ruled by justice.”

Peter and Barnabas were friends; they had true affection for one another. But they were not true spiritual friends, for their friendship did not prevent them from falling through temptation into sin. At just the moment they should have resisted the devil and stood up for righteousness, each failed, and they fell together. Paul was the true friend of both Peter and Barnabas, for he loved them enough to confront them in their sin, and that in front of a large company of their peers – those before whom they had sinned together. Paul had affection for Peter and Barnabas. But he did not allow his love for them to keep him from addressing their need. For Paul also had sound reason, rooted in the divine Word and focused on the upward calling of Christ, and reason prevailed over sentiment, as Paul practiced true friendship to strengthen and recover those who had fallen into sin. Friends are like that, yeah, they are.

Talk with some of your soul friends: How do affection and reason work together to strengthen true friendship? How can you together strengthen each of these?

Lord, I need to talk with a spiritual friend about...

Day 11: Morning

Together before the Lord

I was glad when they said to me,

“Let us go the house of the LORD.” Psalm 122.1

“Friendship will be full of riches for those who cherish it when it is completely centered upon God; for those whom friendship joins together, it immerses in the contemplation of God.”

True friends spend time together in the Lord’s presence – sharing favorite passages of Scripture, praying and singing to the Lord, talking with one another about His abundant goodness, truth, and grace. True friends encourage one another in their relationship with the Lord, talking about the enjoyment they derive from Him, the insights they are gaining, and the ways He is at work in their lives. Friends I talk with from different states lead me into the Lord’s presence by sharing from their morning devotions, praying with and for me, and probing me to learn what the Lord is doing in my life these days. We need such friendships, brethren, friends who will keep us centered upon God and gladly join us in His holy throne-room. Such friendships are a critical component of the work of making disciples.

If we are truly together in the presence of the Lord, the Lord will be the focus of our words and meditations. Can you think of some ways to bring more of this experience into your friendships?

Let me encourage my friends today, Lord, that they may come to know...

Day 11: Evening
Begin Here

No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 1 John 4.12

“One must first lay a solid foundation for spiritual friendship upon which its principles may be based. If this is done, the person who is ascending the higher reaches of spiritual love by a direct path ought not to neglect this foundation nor go beyond it, but instead exercise the greatest caution. The foundation of which I speak is the love of God; by this foundation we should measure all those things which either love or affection prompts, all those things which either the heart secretly suggests or some friend openly urges.”

For the believer, loving God is the foundation for every choice, decision, and action in life (cf. Matt. 22.34-40). Only as we love God, and are growing in love for Him, can we sustain the kind of spiritual friendships Aelred has in mind. Because only the love of God gives us the strength to deny ourselves, preferring the needs of others to our own, and seeking ways to minister God’s grace. Love for God supplies the orientation to sort out proper from improper affections, and the wisdom to know what is the proper path for love. Soul friends should above all encourage one another in love for God, for by so doing they strengthen the bonds of friendship which bind them to one another.

How do you seek to encourage others in love for God? In what ways are you seeking to improve love for God yourself?

Lord, You know that I love You. Today I have shown You my love by...

Day 12: Morning To here
Belonging to One Another

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. Philippians 2.19, 20

“However, once a friend has been accepted, he must be so tolerated, treated, and agreed with that, as long as he has not permanently departed from that foundation of friendship which we have agreed on, he will belong to you and you to him, as much in temporal as in spiritual matters, so that there will be no difference between you on affairs of the soul, the affections, your wills and opinions.”

Soul friends will frequently disappoint or disagree with one another. This is part of that “iron sharpening iron” process the Lord uses to shape one another for His Kingdom and glory. So long as love for God remains the foundation of our relationship, we can work through our differences or find ways of tolerating them in love. This is hard work, to be sure, but this is the way friends relate. None of us is perfect or knows everything with complete knowledge and insight. If we didn’t clash or rub one another wrong from time to time, our friendship might not provide the impetus for growing into Christ that the Lord intends. In our friendships, we need to make room for differences of opinion, but without compromising love for one another and for the Lord.

How does Jesus’ friendship for us model the behavior Aelred recommends in this excerpt? How have you experienced His long-suffering with you as one of His friends?

Lord, I want to be a source of encouragement and edification to my soul friends. Today, give me some opportunities to...

Day 12: Evening

Fit Friends

...and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you... 2 Peter 3.15

“Therefore this is the sort of man you should choose for a friend: one who is not troubled by the fury of anger, nor divided against himself by instability; one whom suspicion does not wear out, nor garrulousness loose from the dignity that is customary among us. It will be especially useful if you choose as a friend one whose character and nature fit your own.”

By “fit your own” I don’t think Aelred means, “just like you.” We all need balance in our lives, and soul friends can provide that. God gave Eve to Adam because she was “opposite to him”, as the Hebrew has it. That is, she complemented him in many ways and was thus a “fit” companion. Peter and Paul were friends, but it took some doing for them to fit together. Paul submitted to Peter in Jerusalem – which may have been a bit of a struggle for him, given their respective backgrounds. And Peter was taken to the woodshed by Paul in Antioch – which was just what he needed at the moment. But the two loved and respected each other and benefited from their friendship, despite their differences in backgrounds, callings, and personalities. A fit friend will provide balance, stretching, and support for your walk with and work for the Lord – just as you will for your friend. Such friendships are indispensable aids to growing into Christ.

What would you describe as a “fit” friend for you? Do you have such friends in your life?

How have my soul friends proven themselves to be fit friends for me this day, Lord? Thank You for...

Day 13: Morning

In the Worst of Times

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matthew 5.44, 45

“However, in this respect friendship is more probable and its virtue is more clearly proved, when a friend does not cease to be the friend he was, even to one who harms him: he loves the one by whom he is not loved, he honors the one by whom he is despised, he blesses the one by whom he is cursed, and he does good to the one who devises ruin for him.”

This is a tall order, indeed. It’s hard to imagine that we could continue as a friend to one who consistently inflicted harm or caused offense to us. But if we are called to love our enemies, who always abuse us, how much more must we continue to love our friends who sometimes fail us, though we know they continue in love for God? We take comfort in knowing that Jesus perseveres in loving us, though we fail and betray him often. He has called us to love one another as He loves us; therefore, we can do no other than to love those who cause us pain. Friendships are strengthened by such love, and friends grow together into Christ, Who loves even His enemies. When the world sees this kind of love among the members of Christ’s Body, it will have reason to believe that something truly new and mysterious is at work.

What do you consider to be the keys to continuing to love someone who has wronged or harmed you in some way?

Lord, I will need Your grace and power to love those who might wrong me today, especially as I...

Day 13: Evening

Four Considerations

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” John 15.13-15

“Four considerations seem to hold especially in the case of friendship: love, affection, security, and delight. Friendship involves love when there is a show of favor that proceeds from benevolence. It involves affection when a certain inner pleasure comes from friendship. It involves security when it leads to a revelation of all one's secrets and purposes without fear or suspicion. It involves delight when there is a certain meeting of the minds – an agreement that is pleasant and benevolent – concerning all matters...”

These seem like reasonable tests for friendship. Where these exist, friends are growing together as disciples of the Lord. Do we truly *love one another*, so that we are willing to set aside our own interests when necessary, and go to any lengths to help our friend? Do we *feel deep affection* for one another, reinforcing our commitment and deepening our love? Do we enjoy one another's company? Do we *feel safe* in our friend's confidence? And do we *rejoice* to find our thoughts running together along similar lines? These criteria, of course, can be found to some extent among friends in the unbelieving world. But when founded upon love for God and held together by Christ's love for us, then true friendship – which overcomes trials, obstacles, setbacks, and disappointments – can blossom and bear true spiritual fruit.

Suggest some ways for strengthening these criteria with one of your soul friends, then talk with him about it.

Thank You, Lord, for how my soul friends have loved me today. And I have loved them by...

Day 14: Morning

Faithfulness above All

Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4.2

“In friendship there is nothing more outstanding than faithfulness, which seems to be both the nurse and guardian of friendship. In all of life’s turns, in adversity and prosperity, in joy and sadness, in delightful and bitter circumstances, it reveals itself to be comparable to friendship, holding in the same regard both the humble and the exalted, the poor and the rich, the strong and the weak, the well and the infirm.”

A friendship is like a trust. Friends exercise a certain stewardship toward one another, and commit to nurturing their friendship, so that the fruit of discipleship may flourish. Someone entrusts us with the care and nurture of his soul, and we become stewards of his wellbeing. Paul says that stewards must be faithful and trustworthy. Whatever their stewardship requires of them, they must reliably perform. Don’t we all want friends like that, who will stand by us in good times and bad, when we’re up and when we’re down? Then if we would have such friends, we must show ourselves to be friends like this as well – faithful stewards of the trust placed in our hands.

What are your friends looking for from you in the way of faithfulness?

Today, Lord, I will show my faithfulness to my soul friends by...

Day 14: Evening
As Yourself

“And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”
Matthew 22.39

“Behold, here is the reflection of love: Do you love yourself? Yes, indeed, if you love God, and surely if you are the sort of person I describe as worthy to be chosen for friendship. But do you think that you should give yourself some reward for this love of yourself? Not at all: Everyone holds himself dear. Therefore, unless you transfer this affection for yourself to another, and love your friend freely, because your friend is dear to you simply because of who he is, you will not be able to enjoy the pleasures of true friendship.”

It’s not wrong to love ourselves. It *is* wrong to love ourselves too much, or in ways not consistent with how God loves us. We love ourselves too much when love for ourselves overrides love for God and others. We love ourselves as we should when we strive for the holiness and happiness that accompany knowing God, seeking His Kingdom, and serving others with His grace and truth. If we keep love for God foremost and pure in our hearts, founded on His Word and grace, then we can learn to love others in the way that God loves us and we love ourselves. And that’s what the Lord intends. Healthy self-love should translate into healthy love for others, if we are to fulfill everything that is written in the Law and the prophets. Only God can enable us to love like this.

How do you know when love for yourself is beginning to go awry?

Lord, I wait on You now. Show me any ways my love has gone astray today, and help me to...

Day 15: Morning

Watchers of Souls

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13.17

“Besides pastors, we have in the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland more than fourteen thousand men ordained as elders, to watch for souls as those ‘that must give account;’ and to whom are addressed the solemn words, first spoken to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, ‘Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.’”³

David Dickson was what Presbyterians call a “ruling elder” – a layman entrusted with pastoral oversight of people within his congregation. In Presbyterian circles, pastors and elders are regarded as shepherds, though this seldom works out in practice. David Dickson’s little book on the work of shepherds contains much sound advice for any who serve in such a role, whether they are called elders, deacons, wardens, leaders, or some other term. Disciple-making is a two-way street. The shepherds of God’s flock watch over the souls of His sheep, being faithful to care for each one as the Lord would Himself. At the same time, the people of God must be willing to submit to such pastoral oversight. We can perhaps see here why Aelred’s teaching about friendship as the context for disciple-making is so important.

Who is responsible for the work of shepherding in your church? Are all the people in your church cared for by able shepherds?

Thank You for the shepherds of our church, Lord. Today I will show that I appreciate them by...

³All quotations are from David Dickson, *The Elder and His Work* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1990).

Day 15: Evening

Fitted for Ministry

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry... Ephesians 4.11, 12

“...neither in this country nor in America does [the office of elder] appear to have been used as a help to spiritual life in the way of evangelization and edification to anything like the extent to which it is so well fitted to be.”

Mr. Dickson might just as well have been writing about our own day. Primary among the responsibilities of God’s shepherds is that of gathering the flock and building them up in the grace and truth of the Lord – guiding, helping, and encouraging them to grow into Jesus. The qualifications set forth in Scripture for those who serve as shepherds, and the examples of those faithful New Testament shepherds, suggest that we have gotten off course somewhere. If you are a pastor or teacher in your church, you have one primary job description: equip the saints of God, so that they can do the work of ministry He has prepared for them. Faithfulness in ministry is not measured by what *we* regard as important, but by what *God* has appointed. Preaching and teaching may be helpful in our calling, but they are not ends in themselves. Only as the saints of God are growing into Jesus and serving Him day by day can we say that our labors in the Lord are not in vain.

What specific tasks do the shepherds in your church fulfill? Are these the ones required of them by Scripture?

Have I grown as a disciple today, Lord? As I think back over my day, I...

Day 16: Morning
Lack of Will

“...as it was shown you on the mountain, so shall they make it.” Exodus 27.8

“We need no new machinery in the Christian Church. It is all provided ready to our hand in the Presbyterian [leadership by elders] system. What we need is the motive-power to set it going and keep it going.”

Moses would not have thought for a moment about doing anything other than what God had instructed him to do while he was together with Him on the mount. What hubris he would have shown, had he not followed the Lord’s explicit instructions in building the tent of the Lord. God has declared that He will build His Church through the work of faithful shepherds, as they equip His people to grow into Jesus and serve Him in their everyday lives. (Jer. 23.1-4; Eph. 4.11, 12). But we prefer the “new machinery” of buildings, programs, boards, committees, teams, and whatnot to the simple but hard work of shepherding the flock of God. No amount of substituting our best ideas for God’s revealed truth will end up with congregations filled with true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must make disciples according to the pattern He has revealed in His Word, and not just any way we think will work. The Lord has shown us how to build His Church. Do we have the will to follow His Word?

How would you define the work of shepherding? Can you support that definition from Scripture? Are you practicing this work to equip God’s people for ministry?

I know, Lord, that You have commanded us to make disciples “as we are going” (Matt. 28.18-20). Today, as I’m going here and there, help me...

Day 16: Evening

Any Other Name

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you... Titus 1.5

“The eldership, under some form or other, is absolutely necessary for a healthy and useful Church. The Wesleyans have adopted it largely in the form of class-leaders. Many Baptist and Congregational churches expect their deacons to do the elders’ work. And many intelligent Episcopalians desire to have lay agency formally sanctioned in their churches.”

Dickson was not a stodgy Presbyterian. He understood that the *work* of shepherding – equipping God’s people for lives of ministry – was more important than what you *call* it. A shepherd by any other name is still a shepherd. The primary work of elders is to shepherd the flock of God, and if your church prefers some other name, so be it. But don’t let the work of shepherding fall by the way side. Paul indicated that a church is not quite “in order” until it has shepherds functioning in their proper roles. God is a God of order (1 Cor. 14.40), and He has prescribed the kind of order He intends to use in helping His people grow into Christ and live as His witnesses. If you’re not following God’s order for equipping the saints, then how can you expect to realize God’s promised results – disciples who live as witnesses for Christ?

Paul seemed to think that a church was not quite “in order” until it had shepherds. Why do you suppose he thought this? Would you describe your church as “in order”? Explain.

I thank You for the shepherds of our church, Lord, and tonight I pray for them that...

Day 17: Morning

Absolutely Necessary

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14.23

“So necessary is the eldership for the superintendence of a congregation, that practical wisdom would demand it even if Scripture did not provide it. In ordinary congregations it is physically impossible for the ministers to do all that is needful, or they must cease to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

Pastors have two primary responsibilities when it comes to helping their churches grow: the ministry of the Word and prayer. Whatever pastors do beyond these, or without them, is something other than what God has called them to do. But who will disciple the people, see to their spiritual needs, watch over their souls day-to-day, lead and encourage them to grow into Christ, and help them find their place of service? This is the work of the elders – the shepherds of God’s flock, whatever we may call them in our local churches. Such solid disciple-makers don’t just happen; they must be equipped for the work, and helped and encouraged in carrying it out faithfully. Finding and developing such leadership must be a primary focus of any pastor’s ministry of the Word and prayer. Are you making disciple-makers? Or are you just preaching, teaching, counseling, running committees and programs, and so forth, without proper regard for the results such efforts are achieving? Jesus is looking for disciples. And He’s looking to His shepherds to prepare them.

What procedure do you follow in your church for identifying and equipping those who are to serve as shepherds?

I want to encourage our shepherds today, Lord, so help me...

Day 17: Evening

A Happy Prejudice

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5.12, 13

“Our people know well the necessity and usefulness of the office of the eldership. All over Scotland there is a *happy prejudice* in favor of an elder’s visit. No elder could ever say that they did not welcome his visits. The houses and hearts of the people are ever open to those whom they have called to this office.”

Visiting people in their homes? Bringing the work of disciple-making into the personal lives of men and their families? Where does *that* happen today? Where are shepherds willing to do it, or people willing to abide it? It is difficult for shepherds to do their work without a spirit of cooperation and submission among the members of the church. The work of the elder is to watch over the souls of the people and to build them up in the most holy faith. Who would not welcome help in this matter? Yet in many churches the people show little zeal for following their leaders, and can even resent efforts seeking to discover their needs in the Lord. And in just as many churches, elders and pastors don’t shepherd the flock of God for growth into Christ. They run programs, conduct services, and put out fires within the congregation. We are prejudiced *against* God’s pattern and instruction, and *for* the ways we find most convenient and manageable. Where, then, is the work of disciple-making? The paucity of true disciples among the communities of Christ in our time suggests that real disciple-making, shepherd-to-sheep, isn’t happening. Are we OK with that?

Would you say that your congregation has a “happy prejudice” toward the work of elders? Why or why not?

As I think about tomorrow, and where I will be going in my life and work, show me what I can do to...

Day 18: Morning

Spiritual Men

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach... 1 Timothy 3.2

*“The office and work being spiritual, it is necessary that elders should be spiritual men. It is not necessary that they be men of great gifts or worldly position, of wealth or high education; but it is indispensably necessary that they be *men of God*, at peace with him, new creatures in Christ Jesus; engaged in the embassy of reconciliation, they must be themselves reconciled. We must love the Master, and the work for the Master’s sake.”*

The word *bishop* in our text is *overseer*, and refers to those who are appointed to shepherd the flock of God. The shepherds God seeks are to be a specific kind of people, as Paul explains in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. How often in our day are church leaders elected for all the reasons Dickson says are “not necessary” – “great gifts or worldly position, of wealth or high education.” And how infrequent it is to find men serving in leadership who “love the Master, and the work for the Master’s sake”? If your elders or leaders are of this latter kind, give thanks daily to the Lord, and encourage and assist them in their important work. If you do not have such leaders, then you must devote yourself to casting a vision for such men, providing the disciple-making energy they need for growing into Christ, and preparing them for this high calling of shepherding God’s flock. For people to grow into Christ as disciples and witnesses of the Lord, they need true *spiritual* men. Pray that God will raise such men as shepherds in churches everywhere.

How would you define a “spiritual man” or a “man of God”? What criteria are used to select leaders in your church?

I want to grow more into Jesus Christ, Lord. I want to be more spiritual in all my walk with and work for You. Today, help me to...

Day 18: Evening

Men of the Word and Prayer

“...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
Acts 6.4

“Though the work of eldership is in itself very honorable and very interesting, yet it will be dull, formal, and worthless, unless there be a real and growing love to Jesus in our hearts. That is the only oil that will make the lamp burn, and keep it burning. We must be men of prayer if we are to honor the Lord in our office. And we must have the word of Christ dwelling in us richly...”

The elder – or pastor, deacon, or leader – has three tools to use in ministering the grace of God to His people: the Word of God, prayer, and his personal example. We need to master each of these as resources for watching over the flock of God. If we are deficient in any one of these areas, all our ministry will suffer – as will those who have been entrusted to our care. But none of these tools can be sharpened or properly wielded apart from a growing relationship with the Lord Jesus. As we are transformed increasingly into His image, His love and life flow out from us to the people entrusted to our care. In prayer, we intercede daily for them. As often as we can, we lead them into the green pastures of His Word. And by our example of seeking and serving Jesus, we make disciples who grow into Him and serve Him as well.

How would you describe the balance between these three tools in your own work as a shepherd of God’s people?

As for my use of these tools today, Lord, I would say...

Day 19: Morning

The Elder's Spirit

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. Titus 1.7-9

“Having many different characters and tempers to deal with, we need as elders to be men of a meek and quiet spirit, not going from one extreme to another – men of practical wisdom and sanctified common sense, and thus able to judge of matters calmly and not as partisans.”

Church leaders must be people of discernment, able to judge with righteous judgment (Jn. 7.24) in ministering the Word of God to His people. We need as elders, deacons, and church leaders, people who work as hard to *be* disciples of Christ as they do at *doing the work* of disciples. As we grow into Jesus, so will those who look for us to lead and care for them as shepherds in the flock of God. The Spirit of God works for righteousness, peace, and joy in our souls, bringing forth in us fruit, gifts, and power for being witnesses and making disciples. When the Spirit we seek and nurture within us is the Spirit of God, then comforting, encouraging, and edifying others in Jesus will be our natural way of life. Only when our spirits are filled and controlled by the Spirit of God will we be fit to help others grow into Him.

How does your church train leaders? What part of that training focuses on developing the spiritual life of the leader?

Lord, help me today, as I will have many opportunities to...

Day 19: Evening

A Matter of Character

... *exercise yourself toward godliness.* 1 Timothy 4.7

“The usefulness of an elder will depend in the long run more on his *character* than on his *gifts and knowledge*... His walk and conversation, his style of living, his companions and friends, his geniality, his amusements, will have an important influence, not only on his own family, but on the people of his district and congregation. Young people especially notice, and get good or evil from, much that they do not speak about to others. They should learn from us what a Christian is like, not by the frequent use of certain pious expressions, but by the clear, transparent outflow of a life ‘hid with Christ in God.’”

“What you do speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you’re saying.” That’s the saying one of my college coaches used to try to motivate us to work harder in practice, rather than our explaining to him why we thought we should be playing more. Peter instructed the elders in Asia Minor to make sure their example was what it should be, as they worked to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5.1-3). Paul pointed to his own example of humility and service to urge the Ephesian elders on in their service (Acts 20.18, 19). Jesus said that the sheep of a shepherd should know him and have enough confidence in him to follow wherever he might lead. If we’re growing into Christ, His holy form and demeanor will show through us, and exert transforming power on those we’re encouraging to grow into Him.

How do the people of your church relate to their leaders? Is it merely through programs and activities, or is there some other method?

Lord, thank You for the shepherds of our church. Tonight I pray for them, that...

Day 20: Morning

Heart to Heart

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 1 Thessalonians 2.7, 8

“Much of our usefulness will lie in not only knowing the wants, natural and spiritual, of our people, but in our having that heart-sympathy with them which will make us open our hearts to them, and will lead them to open their minds and hearts to us in return.”

Good shepherding begins in relationships of mutual love and trust. Our Good Shepherd set the example by *knowing* us, His sheep, and by *leading us to know Him*, our Shepherd. Leaders must lead in establishing such relationships, opening their hearts to those they serve, so that the Lord’s flock might be open and honest with them as well. This can be treacherous ground, given our sinful, selfish bent. But Jesus walked it, and He has set us in His flock to take the same risks as He. For the payoff, when the Spirit blesses such heart-to-heart living, is love and peace and joy in the Lord. Here is where the love of Christ can flourish, and out of that love, all the fruit of the Spirit and gifts for ministry that go to building-up the Body of Christ. The harder we work at knowing our sheep and being known by them, the greater the benefit will be to the whole congregation.

Such relationships take time. How much time do your elders, deacons, or leaders spend getting to know the people in their charge?

Help me, Lord, to know the hearts of those You have called me to serve. Today lead me to...

Day 20: Evening

Know Your People

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”
John 10.14

“If the great ends of our office are, by God’s blessing, to be attained, it is plain, in the first place, that *the elder must know the people in his district*. He must be acquainted with them all, old and young, their history, their occupations, their habits, their ways of thinking. They and their children should be his personal friends, so that they naturally turn to him as to one on whom they can depend as a kind and sympathizing friend and a faithful counselor.”

Getting to know people is a high calling and great privilege. For an elder, pastor, or church leader, it is a key component to succeeding in your calling. It requires continuous work, since people’s attitudes and needs change frequently. The goal of such knowledge is not just casual acquaintance, but trust and love, a relationship in which people feel truly connected with and esteemed by someone who loves them and cares for their souls. Jesus’ example of investing in His disciples is the model we must follow in developing relationships and making disciples of the people under our care. You can’t do this from some slot on a committee, or standing behind a lectern in a classroom. Jesus sought the sheep, to fold them securely into Himself. We must do the same.

Do the leaders or elders in your church have an assigned “flock” for whom they are responsible? How do they get to know the people in their care?

Whom will I see tomorrow, Lord, and how can I get to know them better? Help me, Lord, to...

Day 21: Morning

Get Out and Visit

“...I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house...” Acts 20.20

“The frequency of an elder’s ordinary visitation must depend on the nature of the district, the time at his disposal, and the mode of his visitation. Some visit throughout their districts every three months, but perhaps in most cases a half-yearly visit may be found sufficient. Be it more or less frequent, however, every elder should have a plan and keep to it.”

So, elders and pastors, do you have a plan for visiting all your sheep in their homes, or at their places of work? And are you keeping to it? Does every member of the flock in your charge receive a caring, attentive, soul-friend pastor visit regularly? In our day, we take a more “come/see” attitude toward the church than a “go/tell.” We run programs and sponsor activities and try to encourage the people to come to where the leaders are, in the hope that something about the leader and the program will rub off in the bargain. Such an approach to building the church has no Biblical warrant, and is contrary to centuries of church practice. Shepherds must go out to look and care for the sheep, rather than expect the sheep to come to where the shepherds “do their thing.” We’ll never turn our world upside-down for Jesus until we turn ourselves and our churches rightside-up according to His Word.

Do your leaders, elders, or deacons regularly visit all the people in your church? What might be some goals for such visits?

I need to set up some visits with the people entrusted to my care, Lord. Today I will...

Day 21: Evening
Visit with Joy

For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1.8

“Let us never seem when visiting as if we grudged every moment, as if we were fidgeting to get away – a habit both rude and injurious. When we come into a house we should seek to bring some of heaven’s own sunshine into it. The children must not run away and hide themselves, but be the first to welcome us; for, like their fathers and mothers, they should be all our personal friends.”

Making disciples is not something to be accomplished, in the first instance, in programs and classes. Making disciples should occur in homes, where elders and leaders visit the members, share in their lives, bring the ministry of the Word and prayer, and encourage the heads of households to continue the good work of equipping their families for following Jesus Christ. Don’t you love that image of bringing “some of heaven’s own sunshine” into the homes of the people you visit? If you are growing into Christ, that won’t be a problem. And if you thus shine the light of His love on the people you are called to equip for ministry and lead to grow into the Lord, they will look forward to your every visit. And so will you.

Would you say that the homes of your congregation are bases for disciple-making? Why or why not?

Lord, give me joy in making disciples! Help me tomorrow to...

Day 22: Morning

Hospitality

A bishop then must be...hospitable... 1 Timothy 3.3

“Our people should all know our dwelling, and feel that they are always welcome to come there when they wish to consult us. We may have visits from inquirers, especially young men, whom we can often help very much. It will be well for them to feel that we can talk on other subjects besides religion and now other books besides our Bible.”

Jesus said that a good shepherd knows his sheep, and his sheep also know him. What better way to show ourselves loving to those we are called to serve, than by opening our lives and homes to them, and making ourselves interested in the things that are of concern to them? As they feel welcome and loved in our presence, they will be more likely to receive our instruction and encouragement as we give it. The practice of hospitality is important in making disciples, both because of the actual time it provides for getting to know people and encouraging them in their walk with the Lord, and for what it symbolizes about opening ourselves to others, so that they can share in our lives. Hospitality can be practiced at many levels, and in quite casual and informal ways. It is a frame of mind that reaches out to others and says, “Welcome.” We can practice hospitality at work, out in the community, and even while we’re at church. But when it comes to making the most of this discipline, there’s no place like home.

What are some ways that you practice hospitality with the people God has called you to serve as a shepherd? What would you say are the keys to being effective in showing hospitality to others?

Lord, whom will I see today? Let me show them hospitality by...

Day 22: Evening

Disciple-making

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2.2

“An elder can also do much in guiding a young convert, especially as to his daily life – more in some respects than the minister, who can, of course, know little of the conflicts of grace in the workshop or the place of business. The young disciple must learn to stand the tear and wear of contact with men of all kinds, and he needs grace to enable him to stand his ground...”

The work of disciple-making has two aspects: Helping people grow into Christ, and equipping them to serve the Lord with the gifts He provides. We are being effective as disciple-makers when these results are in evidence in the people we serve. Elders are uniquely qualified to disciple others for following Christ in everyday life, but they must make sure they themselves are growing into and walking with Christ in their own homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Otherwise, how will they be able to counsel others and to help them grow as disciples of the Lord? This is an ongoing process, of course, but as we grow into Jesus, we can ask Him to give us a vision like Paul’s, that will see us shepherding and equipping others, who, in turn, shepherd and equip others still. When such a vision of disciple-making takes hold in a church, real growth as the Body of Christ will occur.

Can you think of some young people in your church who need the kind of personal discipleship that a gifted elder could give?

Thank You, Lord, for those you have put in my life, that I might help them grow as disciples. Tonight, I think especially of...

Day 23: Morning

Get Them to Pray

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting... 1 Timothy 2.8

“*In every way* let an elder seek to stir up his people to *pray* – private prayer especially, but social also. Prayer is the most practical and powerful thing in the world, for it moves the Hand that moves the universe.”

This would seem like a simple task, but I know that pastors and church leaders struggle mightily to encourage their people to pray. The little bit of prayer we hear in times of gathering for prayer is merely a symptom of the little prayer that exists in people’s lives generally. Paul’s focus here seems to be particularly on men (cf. v. 9, as he turns to speak to the women of the church). Men, it seems, need a little extra help and encouragement to take up the calling always to pray, and not to grow weary (Lk. 18.1). Here is an area where elders and pastors must devote themselves to greater and more earnest exertions. We cannot be content for our men *not* to be men of prayer. God calls the men of His Church to take no rest and give Him no rest in their prayers, until He makes His City a joy in the earth once again (Is. 62.6, 7). What is your plan for seeing that happen in your church?

What do you do to encourage the people, especially the men, in your care to greater exertions in prayer?

Today, Lord, help me to encourage those in my Personal Mission Field to be men and women of prayer. And to accomplish this, I will...

Day 23: Evening

Lead by Example

And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. Titus 3.14

“Elders of the Church should be men *ready for every good work* – ready to distribute, willing to communicate. To every cry for help, whether for the bodies or the souls of men, we should instinctively be disposed to say, *yes*, rather than *no*.”

Good works are not the *means* to salvation, but the *evidence* of it. We have been redeemed by Jesus *unto* good works (Eph. 2.10), and it is by our good works that we get the world’s attention for the glory of God (Matt. 5.13-16). But good works are not automatic; they must be nurtured, and we must discover ways of encouraging one another to good works (Heb. 10.24), until our good works are more conspicuous and more numerous even than the good works of Jesus (Jn. 14.12). The people in our churches will be much more inclined to fulfill their callings to do good if they see their leaders doing the same. The elders of the church are not a board of directors, and they are not a leadership team; rather, they are a cohort of shepherds, and shepherds must work hard to care for their flocks. As they do, they set an example for others, who will learn to devote themselves to good works as they see their elders and church leaders taking the initiative.

What are some ways that the elders and leaders of your church might be able to lead your congregation in good works among the members of the larger community?

Thank You, Lord, for those good works You enabled me to do today, in particular...

Day 24: Morning

Church Discipline

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” Matthew 18.15

“For the right discharge of the duty of discipline the elder requires the spirit both of faithfulness and tenderness...The first and great end of discipline, as laid down in Scripture, is the restoration and salvation of the offender. The second is the maintaining of the purity of the Church and freeing it from scandal. The first objective must ever be kept prominent.”

Church discipline is not much practiced these days, although I’m heartened to hear of pastors and church leaders who are beginning to discover this vital tool for making disciples and building the church. Jesus Himself outlined the procedures for this communal discipline, and the apostles followed His directions as often as was necessary (cf. Acts 5; Galatians 2; 1 Corinthians 5; etc.). We are not wise, nor are we faithful shepherds, if we set the practice of church discipline aside. This is an important tool for all believers in helping us grow into Jesus; it is an integral part of the disciple-making process. To do church discipline well, we must maintain faithfulness to God and His Word, and tenderness to those who have offended. Keep these in balance at all times. Church discipline is not *punishment*, but *correction* for growing into Jesus Christ.

Does your church practice church discipline? In what ways have you seen this be a means to reclaiming a sinner for the Lord?

Lord, let Your Spirit guide me into the disciplines I need today so that...

Day 24: Evening

Equip for Ministry

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ... Ephesians 4.11, 12

“We must try to get all the members of the *Church practically interested in the work of Christ*, for ‘none of us liveth to himself.’...What each *should* do will depend on what each *can* do, for ‘she hath done *what she could*’ was the Master’s word of approval.”

The Spirit of God indwells every believer. He is at work within us, to will and do of God’s good pleasure. This entails bringing forth fruit consistent with His holiness, gifts to encourage others in growing into Christ, and power to be witnesses for the Lord. Paul insisted that the Spirit has given gifts to *all* the people of the Lord. However, *most* of them seem content to allow others to carry the responsibility of ministry. But “work of ministry” simply describes everyday living for Jesus, making the most of every opportunity to touch others with His grace and truth. Every believer is called to this, and every believer must be equipped for such a way of life. Elders and church leaders – the shepherds and teachers of the flock – are given to the church for the equipping of the saints, so that they take up the work of ministry right where they are. Let’s make sure that we work hard to get everyone ready to serve.

Do the equipping ministries of your church reach to every member? Are your members truly being equipped for the work of ministry?

Help me, Lord, to cast a vision for ministry to those I’m called to serve. I pray for them tonight, that...

Day 25: Morning

Right Where They Are

“Go therefore and make disciples...” Matthew 28.19

“...they have a sphere which none but themselves can occupy, in their own families, in their places of business, and among their acquaintances. Let them seek the spiritual good of those with whom they come daily in contact. Their lives as well as their lips should be scented with the sweet smell of the Rose of Sharon.”

The only *imperative* verb in Matthew 28.19 is *make disciples*. The word usually translated *Go* is a temporal participle, and is better translated, *As you are going...* This is what David Dickson was referring to, when he mentioned the “sphere which none but themselves can occupy” – what we refer to at The Fellowship of Ailbe as one’s Personal Mission Field. Jesus said, “As you are going,” each of us must be about the business of making disciples. As we grow into Jesus, we will increasingly realize that we have been sent to the world just as He was, to bring near the Kingdom of God (Jn. 20.21). Elders and church leaders must know their members in their own Personal Mission Fields, and equip them to live, serve, and speak to the people they see each day. Lead people to *grow into Jesus*, and they will be better fitted to *go into their world* for His Kingdom and glory. As this work of ministry gets done in the normal, everyday places of life, the Church will grow, and the Kingdom will advance.

How do you help the people you are equipping to think about their daily opportunities for ministry? Have you mapped out your own Personal Mission Field?

Lord Jesus, You have sent me to the world as You were sent, into my own Personal Mission Field. Help me to work faithfully and well today as I...

Day 25: Evening

Rub Shoulders

Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him... Mark 3.14

“Knowledge was not communicated by the Master in terms of laws and dogmas, but in the living personality of One who walked among them. His disciples were distinguished, not by outward conformity to certain rituals, but by being with Him, and thereby participating in His doctrine.”⁴

We recall that Peter and John astonished the religious leaders of Jerusalem because of their boldness, forthrightness, and determination. They were unschooled men, but they had been with Jesus (Acts 4.13). Being with Jesus is the way to grow into Jesus, to become the kind of truly spiritual person Jonathan Edwards described in “A Divine and Supernatural Light.” Aelred of Rievaulx learned from Jesus that spiritual men beget spiritual men, when they nurture and sustain true soul friendships together. David Dickson called on shepherds to take the work of disciple-making into the life spaces of those entrusted to their care, and to bring those they are helping to grow into Christ into their own homes and lives. This is what Jesus did, and it’s what we must do as well, as Robert E. Coleman will explain. We cannot make disciples through programs; Jesus shows us that we must be willing to invest personally in the lives of a few, by spending time with them in a variety of personal and ministry situations.

How does spending time with men feature in your own work of disciple-making?

You have called me to make disciples, Lord, and You send me each day into my own Personal Mission Field. As I prepare to serve You tomorrow...

⁴ All quotations are from Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1963, 1987).

Day 26: Morning

No Substitute

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Acts 20.28

“There is simply no substitute for getting with people, and it is ridiculous to imagine that anything less, short of a miracle, can develop strong Christian leadership. After all, if Jesus, the Son of God, found it necessary to stay almost constantly with His few disciples for three years, and even one of them was lost, how can a church expect to do this job on an assembly line basis a few days out of the year?”

No pastor can do all the work of making disciples in the church. Making disciples, and spending time with those who are being discipled as part of that process, must become a pervasive attitude and an expected practice of all those who are entrusted with this task. The pastor shows the way, working with his elders and other leaders. Then the elders and all the other disciple-makers follow his example. The goal of our work of disciple-making must be twofold: First, that each member of the church be involved in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, so that they are being increasingly conformed to His image and likeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18); and, second, that the church as a whole grows up into maturity in Christ, as each member makes his Kingdom-seeking contribution (Eph. 4.11-16; 1 Cor. 12.7-11). You cannot wish such results into being. We have to work for them, and working for Christlikeness means taking heed to the wellbeing of each disciple, and the flock of God together, that we are growing together into Christ. And for this to happen, there is “simply no substitute for getting with people.”

What would it take to enfold your entire congregation into a web of disciple-making like this?

With whom will I be able to spend time today, Lord? Show mem how to...

Day 26: Evening
Life on Life

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock... 1 Peter 5.2, 3

“Basically His way was His life. And so it must be with His followers. We must have His life in us by the Spirit if we are to do His work and practice His teaching. Any evangelistic work without this is as lifeless as it is meaningless. Only as the Spirit of Christ in us exalts the Son are men drawn unto the Father. Of course, we can not give something away which we do not possess ourselves. The very ability to give away our life in Christ is the proof of its possession.”

What Robert E. Coleman wrote about the work of evangelism is equally true about the work of making disciples. We must be spiritual people – as Jonathan Edwards insisted – if we would help others grow into Jesus and be more truly spiritual themselves. As we spend time with others – in our homes and theirs, taking a meal together, sharing in ministry – we can encourage one another by our mutual example of seeking the Lord. We must always take care that the example we set before the people of God is a snapshot of what the Lord desires for them to become. Though he can only work closely with a few men, the pastor sets the bar for the spiritual life, personal demeanor, relational skill, and ministry effectiveness of all the people in his care. They will follow your example, whatever example you put before them. This is a matter for much prayer, throughout the day, lest our example be something other than that of Jesus Himself, we cause the brethren to stumble.

Who are some disciple-makers whose personal example has greatly affected your own life? How is your example affecting others?

As I think back on the day, Lord, and the opportunities I've had to encourage others in their walk with and work for You...

Day 27: Morning

As We Do and Say

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11.1

“This was the secret of His influence in teaching. He did not ask anyone to do or be anything which first He had not demonstrated in His own life, thereby not only proving its workability, but also its relevance to His mission in life. And this He was able to do because He was constantly with His disciples.”

Pastors and church leaders frequently express concern about the lack of spiritual vitality among the members of their churches. Their people just don't seem all that excited about Jesus. They aren't active in sharing their faith, and they never bring anyone new to church with them. They just seem content with a kind of *status quo* faith, not really growing, and not too bothered about it, either. Is it possible that they have learned such spiritual complacency from our example? Perhaps it's time to take a closer look at the example we are putting before the people we serve. If they really see Jesus in us, like the disciples saw Jesus, will this not challenge them to seek greater growth into the Lord? The Spirit of God within us can take us beyond what we've ever known or experienced before in the life of faith (Eph. 3.20). Sometimes all we need to stretch us is someone to show us what or how. This is what Jesus did, and it's what pastors must do for the people they are equipping as leaders. Give them vision. Bring them into your life, and show them how to live and serve. Call them to go beyond themselves – not in their own power, but in that of the Spirit. And watch as you and they grow together into Jesus with greater fruit and fruitfulness.

What is your ideal vision for what a church leader should look like? How would you describe his walk with the Lord? His character? His ministry skills?

Lord Jesus, exalted in glory, open up new horizons of life and ministry for me today. Show me how I can better...

Day 27: Evening
On Guard!

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5.8

“Jesus never let His disciples underestimate the strength of the enemy, nor the natural resistance of men to His redeeming Gospel. They were not looking for trouble. Indeed, His admonition to them to be ‘as wise as serpents, and harmless as doves,’ (Matt. 10:16) underscored the need for propriety and tactfulness, but in spite of all their precautions, the fact remained that the world was not likely to receive the disciples with favor when they faithfully preached the Gospel.”

It’s the devil’s lie to make believers think their lives in Christ should never offend anyone. This is one reason why we’re so reticent about the Gospel, why we hesitate to reach out to others in the love of Christ, and why it’s so easy to settle into a kind of *status quo* faith. We don’t want to be discomfited ourselves, and we don’t want to offend anyone by what we believe. We make a mistake when we allow God’s people to think that everybody has to like them all the time. The Gospel is demanding. The Christian life is demanding. Building the church is everybody’s work. When leaders lean on folks to get growing in the Lord, get involved in the work of the Kingdom, pitch in, take up some slack, and get out of the pews, they can expect some push-back. Are we equipping them to deal with that effectively? Do we see that as a subtle ploy of the devil to divert us onto some side track? We need to be on guard concerning his wiles, so that we can stay on task with Jesus, helping others to know and grow into Him.

What are some of the greatest temptations your leaders face in seeking to build the church? How are you equipping them to deal with these?

Lord, I wait upon You now to show me whether I have dropped my guard in any way today, if in any way I...

Day 28: Morning

Heartbeat

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1.8

“Evangelism is not an optional accessory to our life. It is the heartbeat of all that we are called to be and do. It is the commission of the church which gives meaning to all else that is undertaken in the Name of Christ. With this purpose clearly in focus, everything which is done and said has glorious fulfillment of God’s redemptive purpose – educational institutions, social programs, hospitals, church meetings of any kind – everything done in the Name of Christ has its justification in fulfilling this mission.”

Hmmm. Looking at most churches, and most believers, we might think that evangelism *is* optional. Not many of us are doing it, after all. We do our best to convince our “seeking” neighbors to come to church and find out what we’re all about, but there is no mandate for this in the Gospel. We’re supposed to be making disciples “as you are going” (Matt. 28.18-20), that is, in the normal course of our everyday lives. One of the most conspicuous outcomes of growing into Christ is that Christ overflows through us to others. If we’re truly growing into Jesus, then Jesus will make Himself known in our words and deeds, as His Spirit works in our everyday lives. Spiritual people live spiritual lives, seek a spiritual Kingdom, have the mind of Christ and His Spirit, and follow the Spirit’s leading in showing Jesus. Knowing Jesus and proclaiming Him to others is the heartbeat of faith. Pastors who do not evangelize and do not train their leaders for evangelism are, to be blunt, digging the grave of their church – if not on their watch, then during one to come.

Would the members of your church say that evangelism is optional or incumbent on all? Why not ask them?

Lord, I want to bear witness today, by life and by my words. Help me as I prepare to...

Day 28: Evening

What You Inspect

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" John 13.12

"Jesus checked upon the actions and reactions of His disciples as they faced various difficult situations. He kept after them constantly, giving them increasingly more attention as His ministry on earth came to a close. He would not let them rest in success or in failure. No matter what they did, there was always more to do and learn. He rejoiced in their successes, but nothing less than world conquest was His goal, and to that end he always superintended their efforts."

We know the old maxim, "People don't do what you *expect* but only what you *inspect*." How faithful are we in holding one another accountable for progress in the life of faith – personal growth, ministry to the saints, outreach to the lost? If such things matter, we need to check up on our progress, and we need to be prepared, when we do, to stimulate one another to greater efforts of love and good works (Heb. 10.24). We also need to keep in mind that people will rise to the level of our expectations for them. Paul said, "Imitate me, as I imitate Jesus," and he meant it. If we give people a vision for growing into Jesus, and for realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of His Kingdom; and if we equip and encourage them in this high and holy calling; and if we hold them accountable in love for making progress in working their Personal Mission Fields, then we may hope that together we will grow, as individuals and as a community, into more of Christ and more of His Kingdom together.

Who's checking up on you? To whom are you accountable for the kind of things mentioned above?

Thank You, Lord, for those who encourage me, and hold me accountable for growing into Jesus. I think especially of...

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.