

Learn to Disciple from Jesus, Part 1

Jack Hughes

June 11, 2006

If you have your Bibles, turn to Luke 9:1–11, which is where we’re going to begin eventually.

A few months ago, I listened to a biography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon—an audio version of it. I’ve always enjoyed Spurgeon. He was probably one of the greatest preachers who ever lived, and he wasn’t afraid of talking about difficult doctrines. He went after all [of] the really hard doctrines, but he explained them in a way that anybody could understand. He stands as the premier, clear, simple preacher of God’s Word.

As I listened to his life story, I could not help but relate to all the things that he had to go through as a preacher. I think every preacher goes through opposition—from the world, from friends, from other preachers, and [from] other churches. Just listen[ing] to his story [makes] you feel like [you can say], “Man, I know how it feels, buddy.”

He was so attacked that his wife actually created a huge scrapbook of all the slanderous, evil, and wicked things said about him in the newspapers, [and] set it out on a special table with the words on the front of it: “Blessed are you when men persecute you, and revile you, and say all manner of evil against you on account of Me” [see Matthew 5:11]. That was his legacy. [By] the end of his life, he had established some sixty-six different Christian ministries in and around London. He wrote books, pamphlets, letters, written sermons. He was like a well-oiled machine. He established

training schools for preachers who could not afford to attend Oxford and Cambridge, but who wanted to learn how to preach the gospel and disciple other people.

His book *Lectures to My Students*, which is still in print with all the rest of his books, is, in my estimation, the finest book that any preacher, or pastor, or leader could ever get his hands on. It is so packed full of wisdom that when you read it, after you've been in the ministry for a while, you just say, "Yeah, that's right. Yeah, he's telling us what's right there," all the way through the book. It's a great book.

But as I listened [to the biography], I started to feel distressed, because [Spurgeon] was starting to have health problems, and I knew what was going to happen—he was going to die. As the biography continued to wind down, and he was out of the pulpit more and more because of health reasons and the escalating persecution against him increased, and finally, it came to an end, it was a sad day. I was out there, just bummed-out in the garage. Spurgeon died. He had died a long time ago, but [as I was] listening to the story, it was like he died right then.

Robert J. Morgan records these events in his historical devotional *On This Day*:

London's Metropolitan Tabernacle [where Spurgeon preached—that's his church] sits across from a run-down subway station in the south of London, surrounded by housing projects, bars, and abandoned shops. It is off the tourist path, and average Sunday attendance hovers at 300. Its successful ministry attracts young people and serves a vital need in the inner city.

Looked at another way, the Metropolitan Tabernacle has never been the same since Sunday morning, June 7, 1891, when Charles Spurgeon preached there for the last time. He was exhausted in ministry and broken down by denominational conflict. His hair was white, his face lined, his heavy frame weak. He ended his

sermon without knowing these would be his last words in the pulpit:

“These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! And I have had nothing but love from him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! Amen!”

That afternoon his congregation was alarmed to hear that Spurgeon had fallen ill. He lay in bed for over a month, most of the time unconscious, sometimes delirious. London clung to every bulletin, and prayer meetings were held continually at the tabernacle. Months passed. Spurgeon rallied enough in late summer for a trip to the south of France, and hope for his recovery soared. Workers at the tabernacle installed a lift to save him the exertion of the stairs.

But about midnight, January 31, 1892, Spurgeon breathed his last breath, surrounded by his wife and a few friends in his room at [a] Hotel . . . in Menton, France. England was numbed by the news, and 12 days later his funeral cortege was surrounded by 100,000 mourners as it entered Upper Norwood Cemetery in London.

He was 57. He had worn himself out under the banner of Jesus.

Now, maybe you have to be a preacher of the Word, I don't know, but every time I read about the death of a great preacher, it grieves me. It grieves me because there is such a great need for fearless, faithful, uncompromising preachers of the Word today. To read about the death of one is [to feel] a huge loss.

Spurgeon's doctrine was sound and clear. Think of all the ministry experience that he had gained over the years—all of that wisdom from doing

the Lord's work. He was the prince of preachers. He was a sage among pastors. Yet, in God's good timing, he was taken away, and God has not seen fit to raise up anyone like him ever since. Who would argue that the world is in need of more Spurgeons? But is Spurgeon's ministry over? Has it ceased? No—a hundred times no. He did not take all of his wisdom into the grave with him to be covered with six feet of dirt, because he left behind an army of disciples. These disciples have done more for the cause of Christ than Spurgeon by himself could have ever hoped to accomplish. His sermons and written works are still making disciples today, still leading people to the Lord, and still equipping saints for the work of the ministry. And so, Spurgeon, though dead, still speaks and still ministers.

You know, you can light a room with a 100-watt lightbulb, or you can light a room equally well with 100 1-watt lightbulbs. Many of us are 1-watt lightbulbs, but as long as all of us are doing the Lord's work, we get the job done.

I, for one, am one of Spurgeon's disciples. He has taught me many things. And you, because you sit under my preaching ministry, you benefit from what Spurgeon has taught me, so you are really Spurgeon's disciples [as well]. And so, here we are, being blessed by a man who was dead a long time ago. How could this happen? [It happens] because that's how discipleship works. It goes all the way back to Jesus. Jesus was the master discipler of men, and though [He] died some 2,000 years ago, all of us who know Him are His disciples. We are disciples of Christ, though He Himself, personally, died many years ago. He lives now, and He ministers through His Word. He ministers through the Holy Spirit. He ministers through other saints, who are His disciples.

Have you ever thought about your discipleship tree? Just think about that. Think of how [much of a] wall it would take to put your discipleship tree down. Only God could unravel the complexities of it. Think of all the people who have taught you things, and all the people who have taught them things, and the people who taught them, and all the people who taught them. It would be a mess. Imagine if you could trace your discipleship tree

back to the 1800s, and the 1700s, and the 1600s, before the Reformation, through the Dark Ages, all the way back, back to the early Church fathers, to the disciples of the apostles, to the apostles themselves, and then all the way back to Jesus. You have a discipleship tree, and it *can* be traced back to Jesus. This is how the Church perpetuates itself. It's how the Church has always perpetuated itself. We learn things, we tell other people, they learn and they tell other people. That is how it works.

Turn to Matthew 28—a familiar passage to many of us, but a passage it is good to remind ourselves of. It teaches us so much. So many important things are packed into these few verses at the end of Matthew's Gospel. [In Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus said:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

This text is familiar to us because it is what is called the “Great Commission.” There is a central command in this text. Do you know what that command is? It's not “go,” it's not “baptizing,” and it's not “teaching.” It's “make disciples of all nations.” That is the command. And, of course, you make disciples by proclaiming the gospel, by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. You go and you have a friend, and you talk to him about the Lord, and eventually that person repents of his sin, places his faith in Jesus, and is transformed by God's grace. You have made a disciple. When are you to be doing this? As you “go.” When Jesus says, “Go,” He's really saying, “in the process of going, as you live your life, wherever you go, as you go, that's when you are to make disciples.” That's when you tell other people about Jesus. In your going, make disciples through the proclamation of the gospel.

Two things follow that command to make disciples. [The first is]: “baptiz[e] them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

There are actually multiple kinds of baptizing mentioned in the Scripture, but every believer undergoes—should, at least—two baptisms. First, there is spirit baptism, [which] is salvation. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you are born again—the Holy Spirit places you into the spiritual Body of Jesus Christ. Everybody receives the Holy Spirit and you are baptized into Christ’s spiritual Body, the Church.

And, if you love the Lord and if you want to obey His Word, then you will get baptized with water. Baptizing by water is that process by which you are submerged into water and brought up again, symbolizing your death—your union with Christ in death, your deadness to sin, being buried—and then symbolizing your being resurrected to walk in newness of life. That’s why you are baptized. That’s why that ordinance is required: so that each individual can make a public declaration [that says], “I am a follower of Jesus Christ.” And so, every believer goes through those two processes.

[The second thing that follows the command to make disciples is] a final, little present active participle [found] after the baptizing part [in Matthew 28:20], and that is: “teaching them to observe all that [Christ] commanded.” It might be translated this way: “to continually, and faithfully, and always be teaching those you bring to the Lord to not only *know* all that Jesus said, but to *do* all that Jesus said.” That, in a nutshell, is what discipleship is all about. And that is what we learn from our text in Luke 9.

So turn back there to Luke 9 and follow along as I read down through verse 11. Now, last week, we looked at Luke 9:1–11 to see what we could learn about the purpose of signs and wonders. But for this morning, and in following weeks, we are going to focus on what this text teaches us about discipleship—doing the work of the ministry. Follow along as I read:

And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. And He said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not

even have two tunics apiece. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that city. And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” Departing, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again. Herod said, “I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?” And he kept trying to see Him.

When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.

Now, from this text, I have singled out eight principles of discipleship from Jesus’ example, which all of us should be applying to our own lives. This morning, we’re going to get halfway through the first principle. [Laughter from the congregation.] Don’t even go there.

The first principle is this: Call your disciples to engage in ministry. Look at the first part of verse 1, where the text reads: “And He called the twelve together.” Now, just stop there. If you remember, we learned that when Jesus was originally calling the Twelve, they went through about three different phases. We saw this early in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus called them to initial discipleship, then He called them to follow Him, but they didn’t quite understand, and they went back to their jobs. So then He finally had to do a miracle and He convinced them, “I’m talking about full-blown

abandonment: leave your nets, leave your job, leave your post, leave your city, leave your relatives, and follow Me.”

They went through those stages, but here in verse 1, Jesus is calling the Twelve together to receive some pre-ministry instruction. They had already become disciples. They had already left all to follow Jesus. They were already in the game. They were in the ministry. They were doing it. As they traveled around with Jesus, they helped Jesus to do ministry, and they themselves were doing some ministry. But they were just learning how to go out on their own. This passage is about Jesus sending them out by themselves for the first time. So they are doing ministry, they are in the game, and Jesus is calling them to engage in greater degrees of ministry on their own.

This is a vital discipleship principle that all of us need to understand and [that] we all need to apply. We all need to get those we are discipling and send them out to do their own ministry. I think we would all agree that it's important for every believer to be involved in ministry. I have no doubt that if, right now, I created a little questionnaire [that said]: True or False: Is it true that God gives all believers spiritual gifts to use for the edification of the body? True. Is it true that God wants all believers serving in the local church? True or False? True. I have no doubt that all of you would get that right. True or false: Those who are in the local church, who are saved, who have spiritual gifts, and who aren't serving in the Body are in sin. True. I know you would all get 100 percent on that quiz. Yet some of you are not serving. As a matter of fact, I would say [that] a good majority of you are not. This is not good. It's not good for the glory of Christ and it's not good for the local church.

There are [several] basic categories of people in every church. First, there are unbelievers. They are in two categories: [first] there are those who know they don't know Christ, and who aren't serving. [Second] there are those who *think* they know Christ and they may or may not be serving. Now, if you don't know Christ, you have to *become* a disciple of Christ. You have to *be saved* before you can begin to grow, make disciples, and engage others in discipleship ministry. The beginning, the foundation, is:

come to the Lord, know Christ, get saved. Why is that important? [It is important] because the person who doesn't know Jesus doesn't give glory to God. The person who doesn't love Christ, who's never been really born-again, who's never been transformed—they don't do anything for the glory of God. Now, granted, they may go through the same motions, do the same outward acts, look the same, [speak] the same jargon [as a true Christian], but if they don't really love the Lord—if they're like Judas, who followed Jesus around the whole time but didn't know Him—nothing they do gives glory to God.

I don't know if that's you, but if it is you, you need to come to salvation in Jesus Christ. If you look at your life and realize, "You know, I don't love God. I don't love Christ. I don't love Christ's people and I don't want to serve them," you probably are not saved. [There's a] very good chance you're not, because Jesus said, "By this all men will come to know that you are my disciples, by" what? "Your love for one another" [see John 13:35]. If you're unwilling to serve someone, you're unwilling to love them because that is primarily how love is expressed: not in good intentions, and not in feelings, but in *doing*. If you [don't] know Christ, it doesn't matter if you are involved in ministry or not. If you aren't doing it for the glory of God, if you aren't doing it to give glory to Christ and with the proper motives, it still doesn't matter. You have to be saved, you have to know Christ, and you have to do [ministry] for the right motive.

I bring all that up because God-glorifying discipleship starts at the cross, where you realize that you are a sinner, that you deserve God's judgment, that God's wrath is abiding on you, and that you deserve to be judged and be cast into hell to suffer there for all eternity. You understand that, and you also understand that Jesus is the Savior, He is the Son of God, He lived the perfect life, He died on the cross, He was buried, He rose again, conquering death, and He offers, He pleads, He commands all men everywhere to repent. And you hear that call and you understand that you can't save yourself.

It's not about doing good works to be saved; it's about being saved so you can begin to do good works. You place your faith in Christ and Christ alone, you turn from your sins, you receive Jesus as your Lord, your Savior, your King, the ruler of your being. As Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and they" what? "They follow Me" [see John 10:27]. Are you doing that? That's where it begins. God-glorifying discipleship begins with knowing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do not know Christ, then receive Him now. Right now. Today is "the day of salvation" [see 2 Corinthians 6:2].

But what if you are truly saved? Well, among those who are saved, there are several other categories of people. There are those who are recent converts, or maybe [who] are new to the church. You know, you haven't [gotten] plugged in yet. Maybe you just don't know very much. You've only known the Lord [for] a couple [of] months, or six months, or a year. You might be serving or whatever, but you need to get *involved*. In whatever capacity you are able to be involved, you need to be involved. If that is you, you need to press on. You need to learn those disciplines of prayer, and Bible study, and service, and giving, and all those things that God requires of every believer, and excel, and come to the place where you are a mature believer, fully equipped for the ministry.

[Another category is those] who are just disobedient to God. You're not committed to [any] ministry. If I say, "What is your ministry?" [your response is that you] don't have a ministry. You have buried your talents, you have buried your mina. You're kind of like the spare tire in a car—it's with the car all the time, but it never does anything. [You are] like fat cells in the body—they just take up space and resources. You have no ministry you can call your own; you have no disciples. You're neither being trained by someone else, nor are you training somebody else. You're just taking up space. You are not loving God and you're not loving your neighbor. Instead, you're showing hatred toward God and you're stealing from your neighbor, because if you are truly saved, you have spiritual gifts, and those spiritual gifts are for the edification of other people. If you aren't using

those spiritual gifts, you're stealing—you're stealing blessing from other people and glory from God.

Turn to Hebrews [5]. The author of Hebrews speaks to this group of people, to those who hang around but don't really get involved in ministry. In Hebrews 5, [the author] has been talking about Jesus. The whole book is about the supremacy of Christ, and he's talking about Jesus, who is of the order of Melchizedek, who was the king and priest of Salem. [The author] says that [Melchizedek's] priesthood is of a better priesthood than Aaron because even Abraham, the father of the nation [of] Israel, gave Melchizedek a tent. But notice what he says in Hebrews 5:11 and following: "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing"—dull, lethargic, sluggish of hearing. Well, that is interesting. Here the author of Hebrews is saying, "You know what? I have some really cool things to tell you, but I can't tell you. [Do] you know why? [It's] because you've got cotton in your ears. You've become 'sluggish in hearing.'"

Notice what he goes on to say. He tells us why [they "have become dull of hearing"]. Verse 12: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers. . . ." Stop there. What does that tell you? They've been around so long, they've heard so many sermons, attended so many Bible studies, they have so much knowledge that by this time they should be teachers, exhorters, expounders in sound doctrine. Look at the middle of verse 12: "You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food." Imagine that. Imagine being old in the Lord, but a babe in Christ, to have received so much information, so much knowledge, and yet you're still a spiritual infant. You're still a baby in Jesus. You still need to be taught the ABCs of Christianity all over again: This is the Bible, this is what prayer is, "Jesus loves you this you know, for the Bible tells you so."

And why? Look at verse 13: "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant." He says, "It's because you have never changed. You're still on an infant's diet. You

still have an infant routine. You're sixty-five years old [and] you're still drinking milk. You're still walking around with a bottle. When someone tries to feed you some solid food or, God forbid, a piece of steak, you kind of pucker up your mouth and [spit it out]." Why? [It's] because you like milk. [You say], "Don't give me that solid food—I'm a milk drinker, period. 'Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.' That's what I want."

But why is it important that every believer digest solid food? Look at verse 14: "But solid food is for the mature, who because of *practice* have their senses trained to discern good and evil" [emphasis added]. The reason you must learn to partake in solid food—sound doctrine, hard Bible study, diligent prayer, faithful giving, relentless serving—is because that's how you grow up in Christ. That's what it means to be mature in Christ.

[Imagine that] an older couple has you over to their house for lunch. You show up, you're walking through the living room into the kitchen and dining room area, and you look over and there's their son. He's thirty-seven, [with] big hairy arms [and a] beard and he's on the floor on a blanky, wearing diapers, drinking a bottle. Is something wrong with that? Obviously something's wrong. The guy never grew up. He doesn't know how to walk, he doesn't know how to talk, he never went to school [and got] an education, he never learned how to take care of himself, he doesn't have a career, he didn't get a wife and two kids and a dog. He never grew up. And when you look at that, you go, "This is wrong. This is all wrong."

Well, in the same exact way, you see somebody who's been in the church a long time and that person isn't faithfully serving, and giving, and praying, and studying, and taking other people and training them to do the ministry, [and you know that] something is wrong, terribly wrong. You may be old in the Lord, but never confuse old in the Lord with spiritually mature. There are many people in the Church who are still wearing diapers and drinking milk though they have known the Lord for a long time. "Jesus loves me this I know" is about all they can handle. [They say], "Don't talk about redemption, sanctification, propitiation, and the difference between

general and special revelation. I can't handle that stuff! Just give me the 'Jesus loves me' stuff. All I want is milk and that's it. I don't want to know how someone's justified. I don't even know what 'justified' is."

If you are that kind of person, who only wants to hear, and read, and study the milk of Christianity, you are a babe in Christ. You are a spiritual infant. You want milk and not solid food. You know, it's normal for people who are young in the Lord, right after coming to salvation, to learn the basics of Christianity, but it is not right when somebody knows the Lord and yet they're still a baby even though they've known the Lord [for] a long time. The author of Hebrews says, "For solid food is for the mature, who *because of practice*, have their senses trained to discern good and evil" [emphasis added]. You learn the truth; you apply the truth. You learn the truth; you apply the truth—because of practice. The practice of knowledge is what it means to be mature in Christ. That gives you discernment between what is right and wrong.

What does this have to do with our text? You're thinking, "Jack, I have no idea how we got here from Luke 9, half of [verse] one." The point is this: You cannot call other people to engage in discipleship ministry, you can't call your disciples to get involved in ministry, until they're saved, until they're trained, and until they want to do it. That's why it has everything to do with our text. Anyone who knows the Lord and [who] does not engage in regular, faithful, consistent ministry is in rebellion. They're living in the flesh. God is not hearing their prayers. They aren't blessed.

[If] I [say to] somebody, "Hey, come over to my house, I want you to do some remodeling work."

[He says], "OK," [and he] shows up [and says], "Yeah, I need some money."

I give the guy some money, [and] he disappears. He never shows up again. He never does any work, [but] I keep sending him checks.

[I call him and say,] "Yeah, you know, the bathroom still needs to be remodeled. We can't wait until you get to it. Here's another check." A couple of months pass and I send him another [check]. "Yeah, the kitchen needs

to be remodeled. We can't wait until that happens." Would that be smart? Well, listen, don't think God's going to be blessing you as you take the talents He gives you and you bury them in the dirt and you don't show up to do the work.

You know, I talk to a lot of people in counseling, and their lives are spiritually flat. When they read the Bible, nothing's going on. Their prayer life is a drudgery, if it even exists. And I always ask them, "So, [are] you serving in any ministry?"

"Well... no."

"Oh. Well, that's one huge sin in your life."

"Well, you know I... I..." and they [have] all these excuses.

Do you remember what James 1:22 says? "But prove yourselves *doers* of the word, and not merely *hearers* who delude themselves" [emphasis added]. [If] you think you can just call yourself a Christian, call yourself mature in the Lord, call yourself a follower of Christ, but not follow Christ, [then] you are deluded. Following Christ means following Christ, not *saying* you follow Christ.

You see, when a Christian hears the truth, it brings them to a fork in the road—every time. For instance, I show you from the Scriptures "do not be anxious" [see Philippians 4:6]—there's a fork laid before you. I say, "You need to be reading your Bible"—there's a fork laid before you. Any command in the Bible, any instruction from God's Word, any sort of thing you are to do or not do lays a fork in the road. There's the straight, narrow way to follow Christ. And then there's the way of Satan—it's huge, it's broad and many are those who go that way [see Matthew 7:13].

You can either walk away from Christ and follow Satan, or you can follow Christ—every time. Every time you hear a sermon, you walk out the doors, [and] you're either going to follow Christ or you're going to follow Satan. Every single time. There are no other roads—they're the only two that exist. You commit to one of them every single time you hear any truth—anytime you hear it in a song, anytime you hear it driving around in your car, anytime you hear it in a sermon, or a Bible study, or in reading the

Bible yourself, or anytime it comes to your mind. There's a fork laid before you. The truth creates a choice. Will you follow [Christ] or not? And if you say, "No, I'm not going to follow," and you keep saying that, you begin to petrify, stagnate, calcify in a state of rebellion. You quit growing, and God quits blessing [you], and your life is miserable. You have regressed rather than progressed, you have lost your ability to articulate sound doctrine, to share your faith. Your zeal, your passion for the Lord is gone. You're the spare tire underneath the trunk of the car, hanging around.

What is the cure? You need to repent. You need to confess. You need to find somebody, and say, "Brother, Sister, I need some help. I realized that I have just sunk into the quicksand of complacency, and I am [in it] all the way up to my mouth. I am almost dead in stagnation. I need to be involved in ministry. Help me, please. I beg you." And you know what? There are some who are just going to be too proud to do that. They're too ashamed to do that. That means that those of you who are involved in ministries, you look around, you see that person, [and you think], "You know, I don't even know that person. I don't even know if they're involved in ministry." [So] you go over to them and [say], "Hey, hi, how are you doing? My name is so-and-so. Are you serving anywhere?"

"Well, uh... uh... no."

"Well, you're going to be serving now. Show up at this time. I'm going to teach you how to do my ministry. We're going to go out and share our faith. We're going to go out and do something for Jesus." Rope other people in. Grab them in. And you know what? You might have to tell people, in the love of Christ, in a loving way, "Listen, you are in sin. You know you're in sin. You need to start obeying Christ. If you're going to say that you are a Christian, a follower of Christ, then you need to start following. I'm going to teach you how to do my ministry. We can serve the Lord together. You know what? If you find out that you aren't gifted in that ministry, fine. I will hook you up with another person and they will teach you their ministry, and eventually you'll find one you're good at."

In the midst of all this, there are those who think they are believers and they are growing in Christ because they know a lot about the Bible. There are some people who grow up, they just love studying, they just love learning. You can say, “OK, what’s the difference between superlapsarianism, sublapsarianism, and infralapsarianism?”

And they go, “Oh, yeah, well, I know all about that.”

“Tell me about Calvinism. Tell me about the attributes of God. Tell me about justification. Tell me about the order of the divine decrees and the persepucuity of Scripture.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. I got all of that.”

And [then] you say, “Hey, what ministry are you in?”

“Oh, yeah. . . I’m not doing that right now. I just got a new, 1,400-page systematic theology and I’m reading that.”

These people have heads like beach balls—so swelled with knowledge, but no application, deluded. [They are] well-educated, severely deluded people. That knowledge is for doing, not for accumulating. And you know what? You can be one who accumulates knowledge, who knows a lot about Christ, and a lot about the Bible, and a lot about doctrine, and a lot about Church history—you can actually be a disciple of Jesus and not be a believer.

Turn to John 6. Let me show you this. In the preceding context, Jesus has performed miracles, a great multitude has gathered, Jesus tells the multitude that He came out of heaven, that He Himself is the Bread of Life, that whoever eats of His flesh and drinks His blood will live forever. Now, look at verse 60. This is John 6:60: “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, ‘This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?’” In other words, “What? You are the ‘bread of life’? You came down out of heaven? Listen, you’re Joseph’s son from Nazareth. What do you mean ‘eat Your flesh’ and ‘drink Your blood’? This is offensive to us!”

And so, what did Jesus do? He offended them more. Look at verse 66. After He offends them more, [it says]: “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.” Do you see

that? These people followed Jesus around, they thought His teaching was magnificent. They loved it! They thought it was great. They sucked it up. They liked the miracles. They liked all of it. They walked around in a huge mob—He was like an educational show. But then when the hard calls to discipleship came, what did they do? [They said], “Mmm. Later,” and they walked away.

There are people like that in every church. They can tell you everything you want to know about doctrine and theology, but they aren’t involved in ministry. If you say, “Hey, let’s get our hands dirty. Let’s get into the work. Let’s start following Christ,” they just can’t do that right now, they’re writing a paper on some Hebrew grammar point.

Now, at this point, some of you may be feeling a little heat. You may be thinking to yourself, “Jack, you know, you’re kind of getting in our faces.” If I have, I’ve failed—I’m not trying to “kind of get in your faces,” I’m trying to crawl down your throat. You may be thinking, “Well, you know, when are we going to move on?” We’re *not* moving on. [But] you know what? It’s not my desire to have you leave here this morning feeling all guilty and beat up. I don’t want you to stand out there [after the service] and go, “Oh, man! That was a pummeling. He got me, you know!” No, that’s not the purpose. I don’t want you leaving here feeling guilty, and then trying to forget about what I said all week. I want you to leave here humble, repentant, and committed to living like Jesus wants you to live. That’s what I want.

You know what I really want [for] you? I want you to be blessed. I want you to leave here more blessed than when you came. There is this really strange paradox in the Christian life that takes a long time to learn. We’re so selfish that a lot of times we think to ourselves, “You know, I don’t need to read my Bible today. I mean, after all, I want to do my whatever. I don’t need to be listening to that sermon; I can listen to my favorite music. I don’t need to go to both services. I’ll just go to one and skip Sunday school. I don’t need to come on Sunday night. I mean, after all, there’s a ball game.”

We have hobbies, and jobs, and things that are constantly calling to take us away. We have this idea that if we don't give, and we don't sacrifice, and we just keep everything we have for ourselves, then we'll really be happy, and then we'll really be blessed. But you know what? The exact opposite is true, because in the spiritual realm, God has made this paradox to be true: that those who are givers are gainers, and those who are keepers are losers. He "who loses his life for Christ's sake will find it" [see Matthew 16:25]. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? The servant of all [see Mark 9:35]. The "last shall be first" [Matthew 20:16].

And you know what? When you do ministry, you have to say "no" to whatever [else] you could be doing—that favorite book, that favorite hobby, that favorite TV program, whatever it is. You know, when you give, and you're faithful to give, it means you can't get that new compound miter saw that you've been wanting. Think of all the tools you could buy every month with what you give to the church. Think of all the favorite hobbies, and shows, and entertainments, and whatever you could do. You know what Jesus said? He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" [Acts 20:35]. That's what I want for you. That's what I want for me.

I go out to lunch with people, and you know, it's kind of strange being a pastor, but people go, "Let me buy lunch for you."

I say, "Nah. I'm buying lunch."

They say, "No, no, no. I can't have you buy lunch."

I say, "Hey, I'm buying. You need to submit to your elders." Do you know why I say that? I want the blessing. *I* want the blessing. "Listen, you can buy somebody else's lunch, but I'm buying yours, pal, because I want the blessing." *I long* for the blessing. I want to give as much as I can. I want to serve as much as I can. I want to sacrifice as much as I can. Why? Because I want as much blessing as I can [get]. If you don't learn that principle, you'll just be selfish and miserable all your life.

And man, there are so many joys in the ministry. You think, "Oh, well, I have to sacrifice. I have to give up my time and go visit so-and-so, or minister to so-and-so." Then you go there and they minister [to] and bless

the socks off of you. You [leave, saying], “Man! [He] really ministered to me.” You come away more blessed than when you went. That’s how God has set it up, and some of you don’t even know that. You’re scared to even test the waters of it.

Now, I know there are some of you out there, and you’re already serving. And I know you feel guilty, too, because everybody who serves the Lord wishes he served the Lord more. [Throughout] your whole Christian life you’re trying to jockey, and manipulate, and, “You know, maybe I could just get by on five hours of sleep. . .” No, that doesn’t work—after a while you’re kind of a walking zombie. “OK, OK, I’ll go back to my seven hours. OK, now what am I going to do? Maybe I can condense these things, maybe I can drop this thing, maybe I can streamline these things, and double up, and just get a little more ministry in there, a little bit more for the Lord, a little bit more for Christ.” *That* is life. That is blessing. That is great! To know the Lord and just to be blessed that God is using you and to know that you’re being a blessing to other people, it is so wonderful. You sleep well at night.

Some people say, “Do you ever have trouble sleeping?”

“Yeah. I’m writing sermons all night—Bible studies. It’s so ‘terrible’ to have to think about the Bible that much. I *love* it!”

Sometimes I’m waiting there, I’m kind of tossing in bed, and Lisa says, “Get out of bed and go to the office.”

“It’s only four o’clock, honey.”

“Go!”

“Ha! OK!” I can’t wait! I can’t wait to get my little coffee or tea, have my time of prayer. I’m just like, “Mmwaa ha ha!” Do you know that? Oh, man, it is *so good*.

Whatever ministry you do, it’s great to just have a great ministry, and to see people change in that ministry. Whether [it] be [working with] little ones, or praying for people, or writing notes, or serving, [you] know that you’re a part of the Body. You’re functioning in the Body. You aren’t the spare tire, man, you’re the front! You’re the traction tire. You’re *doing*

something. And if that is you, I just want to encourage you to “excel still more” [1 Thessalonians 4:10].

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 1. The Thessalonians, they had a lot of things going for them. Paul writes and lets them know that they do. Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3. Paul says, “We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind,” notice this, “your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.” Look down at verses 6–9:

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.

Look down at 1 Thessalonians 2:13–14:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.

Look down at 1 Thessalonians 3:6–8:

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.

Now, were the Thessalonians getting with it or what? They were in it, man! They were in the ministry. They were laboring and striving against *severe* persecution. Now, notice what Paul says [in] 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13:

And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Look down at 1 Thessalonians 4:1: “Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.” Look down at verses 9–10:

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.

So if that’s you—if you’re serving—seek to excel. Find that extra piece of time, sacrifice that extra bit, do whatever you can—“excel still more.” You’re never going to get up into heaven, into glory, with all of the saints of

all of the ages and Jesus sitting on the throne and experiencing those things which eye can't even see and ear can't even imagine here on earth, and think, "Man, I have been gypped. This whole heaven thing—Oh! I should have kept my hobby! I should have gone and read more fiction books." No. No, you will never say that. The only thing you're going to say is, "I was such a fool. What was I thinking? Why didn't I give more to Christ? Why didn't I sacrifice more to Christ? Why was I so complacent?" I think the Apostle Paul probably thought that when he got there.

You know, Satan is a wily foe. He's going to whisper in your ear, "You've been a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Look at your past and how you used to obey God, and used to serve in the church, and used to be involved in discipleship. You know, if I were you, I would just crawl into the grave and cover yourself with dirt." He would have you die spiritually and stop serving God. He would rob you of the blessing that you receive by giving. He wants you to think that these earthly things and your own selfish pursuits are actually going to make you more happy, and more blessed than what God has promised to give you.

Now is the time for action. Now is the time to realize [that] if you aren't [serving] already, "I need to serve Christ and I need to 'excel still more.'" There are two reasons given in the text [to "excel still more."] The first reason we've already looked at. The second reason to "excel still more" is [that] Christ is worthy of all we have. [We should serve] not only to receive the blessing, but because Christ is worthy. Can you give too much to Jesus? Can you serve Jesus and worship Him too much? Is Jesus going to say when you get to heaven, "You know, you were a little overboard here, a little fanatical. I wish you didn't praise Me that much. I wish you didn't study My Word that much and serve My saints that much. I mean, after all, you've really, really gone overboard"? He's got angels that say nothing but, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come" [see Revelation 4:8] day and night, twenty-four hours a day, for all eternity. You couldn't do it; you can't serve Him enough.

What's great about the apostles is [that] they were just like us. Turn to Matthew 19. The disciples had left their businesses, their hometowns, their friends, their reputations, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, all [of] that to follow Christ. In Matthew 19:27–28, Peter, who is the leader and spokesman of the Twelve says to Jesus:

“Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Get this in verse 29:

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

You know, you think, “This person has a lot of earthly stuff,” but you know what? The question is: Who is the first for eternity? This life kind of comes and goes pretty quickly. Who's going to be first in eternity? Who's going to be the greatest in eternity? Who's going to have the spiritual wealth, the spiritual prominence, the spiritual blessing? The greatest servants, the greatest givers [will], not the greatest hoarders.

Now, I have more on [Luke 9:1]. That's just the first phrase. Let me just send you out with these reminders of what we have learned. If you're not serving Christ, you need to ask yourself why. Is it that you don't know Christ, [and] therefore you don't love Christ, therefore you don't want to serve Christ and obey Him, or have you gotten sidetracked by jobs, hobbies, and personal pleasures? It's not that you can't have a job, or enjoy some pleasures, but you can never do it to the neglect of what God commands

you to do. Everybody needs to be involved in ministry. Every Christian does, but if you don't know Christ, it needs to start there. You need to know the Lord.

Now, if you do know the Lord, and you aren't following Christ, you need to confess your sins and get involved. You either need to go and seek somebody out in a ministry and have them train you, or you need to go confess and repent and find out who can disciple you even if you don't know what ministry [to do]. Get somebody, cling to them, and say, "I need help."

For the rest of you who are serving, you find those people [who are not serving] and you say, "Come on. I'll tell you what I know. I don't know very much, but I know this much. I'm doing this much." [If you do this], you [will] get to the place where there's so much blessing because everybody's wanting to serve, that you never say, "Oh, we need more workers." We won't have to say that because there [will be] people lined up, and they'll [be] arguing and flipping coins to see who gets to serve next.

If you are serving Christ, be encouraged, thank God, praise God, for your reward in heaven will be great. You are an example to the whole Body. You are a blessing to this church. You are the moving, working members of the Body of Christ. Grab other people and get them involved. Distribute the load. And this is what you'll find happening: pretty soon when people have this serving mindset, all of a sudden there's not enough to do here among ourselves, so we're going to go out and do something in the world. That's when the Church really starts growing. That's when what we learn here goes out into the world.

Now, I'm going to close with the same words that I read earlier. These are the last words that Spurgeon ever spoke in his pulpit, and it just happened to match one of the songs we sang, "Lift High the Lord Our Banner." Do you remember how we do that? It's by serving Him—that's how you "lift [high] the Lord." Spurgeon said:

These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! And I have had nothing but love from him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! Amen!

Amen. May all of us be able to say that in our last words. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word, for all that it teaches us about being Christians. Father, I pray for those here who might not know You, who may have never really given their lives to Jesus Christ, turned from their sins, and received the free gift of salvation by Your grace. Father, may you open their hearts, may they cry out to You right now where they are sitting, may they cry out and say, "Lord, save me, for I am a sinner and I know I cannot save myself. I place my faith in Jesus Christ, in His death, in His blood shed for me on the cross. I know that You will save me. So, please do it. Change me and make me new." Father, if there [are those] who need to pray that, move in their hearts. Do it and save them and transform their lives. For the rest, who know You, I pray for those who aren't involved in ministry [that] they would feel so much shame, and so much guilt, and so much remorse, and conviction that they would repent, that they would confess their sins, that You would wash them whiter than snow, that they would leave here filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time in a long time. That they would have an excitement, a germ of anticipation welling up within them, that they are going to make changes and they are going to now become what they profess to be—followers of You. And Father, for the rest who are serving, may You bless them. May You encourage them. May You give them strength. May You give them the motivation to bring others into their ministry, that more might be trained, more might be equipped, that we might become an army in this community and this world. That we might leave the imprint of our spiritual legacy until You come back for us.

That we might give You more glory still. We pray all these things in Christ's name, Amen.