Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

The Journey Continued – Week 39

Walking with Christ

Day 267. Walking with God

When we began, you talked a lot about a path of life. Then you talked about Jesus, and His actions. You spoke about baptism, the church, the bible, prayer, and suggested daily disciplines. You characterized our lives as being amid a war between good and evil. I decided to give my life to God and be baptized. Lately, it's been about purpose and focus. When I tell you I don't know if I can do it, you come back with "rejoice?" and "pray?"

Step 1 is to Rejoice. Rejoice that you have eternal life with God our Father, through His Son. Rejoice that the Holy Spirit is with you now.
Step 2 is to converse with God, continually. Remind yourself that He is with you, at all times, in the Holy Spirit. Look for Him in the everyday activities of your life. Our life is not a "religious program" – it is an ongoing relationship, a relationship with Christ.
Step 3 is to build yourself up.
Step 4 is to give.
Step 5 is to live.

All the steps are self-reinforcing. Everything we have discussed to this point is preparation for, and tools to use, in the five steps. This week, let's focus some more on each step.

Thinking back over what we've done in this course so far, what can you do to enable step 3? What can you do to meet step 4? What is step 5?

Share with those you trust.

Day 268: Rejoice

Rejoice:

1. To feel joyful; be delighted.
2. To feel joyful about something.
3. To fill with joy; gladden.

The search to be constantly joyful is why people become addicted to things. We know we are not created to be constantly joyful – so why do we read, "Always rejoice" (1st Thessalonians 5:16), and "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4).

Jesus encountered lots of conflict and was killed. All His disciples encountered conflict in their ministry for Him. When the disciples came back glad because evil had been overcome in one of their ministry journeys, Jesus said, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names stand written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

The context in 1st Thessalonians is, "admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient toward all. See that no one pays back evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all. Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not extinguish the Spirit…"

The context in Philippians is Paul urging two strong members of the congregation to be reconciled with each other. Amid their conflict, He urges, "Again I say, rejoice! Let everyone see your gentleness. The Lord is near! Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

There will be times of admonishment, times of discouragement, times of weakness, times of conflict, times of evil. There will be times which encourage anxiety. We are not to ignore such times, nor do we live in a dysfunctional bubble of illusion.

Underneath everything the world throws at us, is the certainty that we are created in God's Image, we are loved by God, and that we are subject to God alone. We are surrounded by God. We have certainty that in Christ, we are destined for an eternity of being loved by God. That is the underlying cause of our rejoicing.

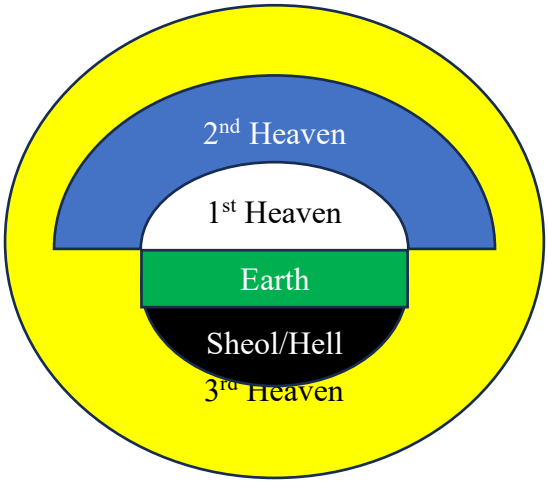
So yes, we encounter discouragement, weakness, evil. We walk into dark valleys. Faith is knowing that though everything in life is going wrong, we are with God. Faith is knowing that we have choices in how we respond to everything going wrong – Godly choices. Faith is knowing that, no matter what happens, whether we succeed or are defeated, God is with us and we shall be with God for eternity. So, we rejoice, not in what is happening to us or to others around us, but that our names *are* written in heaven. We turn rejoicing from an elusive emotion to an acknowledgement of the certainty of our situation in Christ, and a gratefulness for it. We cry genuine tears of sadness, we are hurt with pain, we yearn for the betterment of people's lives, we are anxious for shalom for everyone – and we rejoice. Let that rejoicing settle your heart and

give you peace, the peace of Christ Himself. And always return to the knowledge that, *no matter what* – you belong to God.

Share some of your rejoicing here.

Share with others, to build them up.

Day 269: Converse with God.



Look at this picture again.

God surrounds you. God inhabits all the heavens, and the earth. You cannot avoid God, no matter where you go – you are surrounded by God.

As Paul wrote, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

With this knowledge, how can you not converse with God? Converse with God through well-expressed desires, like the Lord's Prayer and our books of collected prayers. Converse with God through communal worship. Converse with God by saying "thank you" when you see the brilliance of a sunrise or sunset. When you encounter food and drink. When you have a safe place to sleep in comfort. When you meet another Image of God. Converse with God by saying "Help!" when you have need of any kind.

Listen to God. Ask God to open your heart and mind to *His* desires when you get up each morning. Ask again before you read the bible – and then read it. Feel the warmth of God's love in the warmth of the sun. Feel the freshness of the Holy Spirit in the gusts of wind. Meditate on where you fall short of God's love, and then offer that to God, asking for guidance from Him. Meditate on where you have shared God's love, and then rejoice in that, with Him.

It may help to write down what you hear from God, and what you say to God.

Talk to God. Listen to God. Capture your thoughts.

Share your thoughts with those you trust, if appropriate.

Day 270: Build yourself up

"Eat for a longer life" … "Foods which fight cancer" … "The right exercise for your age" …. "Get stronger with least effort" …

It is easy to find advice to improve our physical health. But what about our spiritual health?

The letter from Jude contains, "build yourselves up in your most holy faith, by praying in the Holy Spirit, maintain yourselves in the love of God while anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that brings eternal life. And have mercy on those who waver; save others by snatching them out of the fire …"

Pray. Keep yourself in the love of God. Anticipate the mercy of our Lord Jesus that brings eternal life. Have mercy.

We covered prayer yesterday. How do you keep yourself in the love of God?

Jesus gave a hint: "Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; remain in my love. If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete. My commandment is this—to love one another just as I have loved you." (John 15:9-12).

We show our love for Jesus in keeping His commandments. We won't know God's commandments unless we read and hear them. We read them in the bible, and we hear them when we join together for instruction and reflection. So:

1.) Read the bible
2.) Join together for instruction and reflection (as is written by Paul, "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25)).
3.) Love one another, have mercy (do what is healthiest for the other, especially if they don't deserve it – for we do not deserve the great gift God is giving us).

Read the bible. Join together (at least weekly) for instruction, reflection, and worship. Encourage each other. These are not optional items, but the minimum items needed for a healthy ongoing spiritual life (we'll talk about love and mercy tomorrow).

Describe your pattern of bible reading and gathering for instruction and worship.

Day 271: Give

King George IV of England is an extreme example. Reportedly, George's favourite breakfast consisted of:

- two pigeons,
- three steaks,
- three parts of a bottle of white wine,
- a glass of dry champagne,
- two glasses of port and
- a glass of brandy.

Just for him.

Following breakfast there would be lunch, light tea, afternoon tea, and supper.

He was a glutton, taking whatever he could.

However, Life is not what we take in nor how we take it in.

Life is what we *give out.*

We find love when we give it away. True life is giving away as much as we can, so others can be as healthy as possible. As the bible says, "we have been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them." (Ephesians 2:10).

So, how can we give?

- Give daily to God in your conversations with Him, your bible reading, your gathering together for instruction and worship.
- Give ongoing to God's work on earth by your substantial support of His body, the church – with whatever time, talents, and funds God is blessing you with.
- Most of all, give love: pursue what is healthiest for those in need, whenever and wherever you encounter them.

Hopefully you will not be remembered after your life as King George IV is. Or, as many rich people and tyrannical rulers are remembered, as grasping individuals, greedily taking whatever they could. Hopefully you will be remembered as one who knew God, who supported God's work the best you could, and who, most of all, loved. One who walked in the Way of Christ.

Record some of your conversations with God about giving.

Share if you like, with those you trust.

Day 272: Live

As I asked on day 264, if shalom is living in the healthiest way possible, and you are a person of shalom, *and* the world is obviously not a place of shalom, what can you do about it?

You can:

1.) Rejoice.
2.) Pray.
3.) Build yourself up
    a. Read your bible
    b. Attend community worship and instruction
4.) Give

Number 5, "Live", brings it all together.

Every day,

- Rejoice that you are with God for eternity.
- Talk with God about everything and anything.
- Build yourself up.
- Give, in love.

As shared before, love is the key.

Pursue what is healthiest. Pursue what is healthiest for your life, what is healthiest for the life of God's body (the church), and what is healthiest for all the fellow Images of God you share this planet with – both those you personally interact with, and those you don't.

When you encounter tough circumstances, give thanks that God is with you and that He has love for you, for eternity. When you need help in figuring out God's way, enquire of His body, and search out His word. Read it as discussed before, with multiple levels. Use the tools shared with you in this course, and many others available in the body of Christ, the church.

Encourage each other and allow yourself to be encouraged. Receive from others, for that blesses them in their giving to you. Give in turn. Encourage and build up your fellow explorers in Christ.

Love. The key to living, true living, is love.

Life is giving love, pursuing what is healthiest, and rejoicing that we have been placed on the right road. Life is giving thanks, for all we have been blessed with, and sharing with those in need. Life is giving.

Look to Jesus for salvation, for love, for light, for life; for how to live. Let us rejoice! Let us give thanks. Let us pursue what is healthiest. Let us give love. Amen.

"You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live him. You're deeply rooted in him. You're well-constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving." (The Message Bible: Colossians 2:6-7).

Record how you have lived your life in Christ, today.

Share with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 273: Rest.

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.