



ACTING FAITH

What You Do With What You Know

Text: Luke 9:1-17; Luke 10:1-24

Introduction to the Scripture

Over the past few weeks we've been looking together at some of the seasons or stages that people tend to pass through as they grow to become more and more like Jesus. It's not a given, of course, that any of us will actually do that. Even churchgoing people don't just automatically become more Christlike. A lot of people simply grow into a slightly better or worse version of themselves, their parents, or peers. Some people don't seem to grow much at all – at least not in the internal sense. But if we're going to get to the end of our lives and leave people saying, "Wow, this was a person of amazing love and awesome character and such positive influence – somebody something like Jesus" – then it's going to need to be an INTENTIONAL JOURNEY. In the ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel we get a window into this pathway and I invite you to read it with me this morning... *[Read Scripture Text]*

Discovering Faith

At every stage of the spiritual journey there is a danger that our stage will become a cage. Without ever meaning to, we can get stuck in the spiritual life and stop progressing. I think back to that time many years ago, when I first entered what we've called the DISCOVERING stage of faith. As I shared two weeks ago, some pain and loss I'd experienced and the vitality I saw in some Christians left me with a dawning sense that God was real and that it might just be possible to know him. Suddenly I was looking at sunsets and fingerprints and the pattern of God's grace in life's events with this whole new sense of wonder. I felt a surging interest in spiritual things. It was a pleasure to me to attend the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship meetings they had at my college. I'd sit in one of the rows of chairs with this large crowd of other people and enjoy some seasoned Christian talking about God and Jesus and the Bible. It was sort of like going to church, but I was glad to be there because I wanted to follow Christ and become more like him.

I was about three-quarters of the way through my freshman year when I noticed that I wasn't really all that excited about going to the Christian fellowship meetings any more. I felt kind of guilty about that. But, somehow, just listening to some expert talk about the faith wasn't enough to keep me growing. I was getting hammered about my faith by my roommates who thought I was crazy spending Friday nights at some religious lecture. I didn't know how to answer the attacks they made on Christianity. There frankly didn't seem to be much changing inside of me that would help me deal differently with all the other tests and temptations that come with college life. I was stuck. The Discovering stage had become a cage. I had an interest in God and Jesus but so many missing pieces in my understanding of where to go with this. It can become that way for any of us at any age. I've met people who are pretty old in



ACTING FAITH

What You Do With What You Know

Text: Luke 9:1-17; Luke 10:1-24

chronological years but still pretty young in spiritual years, because they've gotten caged at the Discovering stage. They are admirers of Jesus but not followers.

Nurturing Faith

I think I might have given up on Christianity altogether or settled into some kind of just-going-through-the-motions faith if it had not been for Mark Stephens. Mark was a decathlete from New Mexico and several years older than me. I don't know why he took an interest in me, but he did. Maybe he could see that I was stuck. In any event, Mark said to me, "Dan, I want to take you to the next level as a follower of Jesus." I didn't know there WAS a "next level." I had no clue what the next steps were to make progress in the spiritual journey. But Mark did, and I'll always be thankful to God for him, because he helped me move into that season that we're calling the NURTURING stage of Faith.

There came a time when Jesus called his first disciples to move into the Nurturing season of faith with him. They had already caught sight of the amazing life Jesus lived, but didn't know how to live that *compelling vision* themselves. So, as Greg Ogden suggested last week, Jesus started building their capacity from the ground up. He trained them in *core disciplines* like prayer and rest and study of the scriptures, that would enable them to stay rooted in the person and power of God wherever they went. Jesus equipped them through his sermons, parables, and private discourses with a set of *core beliefs* that gave his followers truth with which to handle the trials and temptations of life. And Jesus also partnered them right from the start with a small *core group* of other disciples, who'd companion and challenge one another to further growth on the spiritual journey.

I didn't have such a coherent way of describing the foundational steps of the Christian life when I was in my 20's; but this is basically what Mark Stephens did with me. He trained me in how to pray and fast and memorize scripture and awakened in me an interest in the spiritual disciplines that continues to be immensely important part of my ongoing journey with Jesus. Mark equipped me with an understanding of the core Christian beliefs by walking me through a book on basic Christianity. And Mark invited me into a small group with other Christ-followers that was so helpful to my growth that I've made a point of being in a group like that just about every week for the past 30 years. How many others of you have been nurtured like this? Who of you needs to take these STEPs now? You'll find some practical help with that on page 12 of the *Journey Guide* we've provided or you can find at our website. The point is that if you want to move from being an admirer of Jesus to being a genuine, growing follower of Jesus, it requires intentional STEPs like these.

Acting Faith



ACTING FAITH

What You Do With What You Know

Text: Luke 9:1-17; Luke 10:1-24

It wasn't until I finished college that I realized that there was another stage of faith beyond the ones I'd experienced. I'm embarrassed to say that I went for a lot of years thinking that being a Christian was fundamentally about DISCOVERING FAITH and learning to worship God and then NURTURING FAITH by developing certain disciplines, beliefs, and partnerships that would help me grow. It took me a long time to see that all of this actually had a purpose beyond me. To put it in a familiar nutshell, the Christian life wasn't just about worship and growth; it was also about service. Jesus wanted me to take what I was learning about him and his way of life and really put it into action.

Somehow, I'd gotten caged in the NURTURING stage of faith. I was this blue-ribbon worship and Bible study attendee, but it wasn't really translating yet into a life of active service. I began to feel like, after all that God and others had done for me it was time that I start becoming much more intentional about doing for God and others. I wanted to give something back. I got really excited about using my gifts to make some kind of difference for the kingdom of God, and it was this impulse that led me to a year of volunteer service after college that became two years working in the inner city of Belfast, Northern Ireland.

It was there that I met a remarkable group of mature Christ-followers who'd decided that God wanted them to use their gifts to bless a part of their city where unemployment was approaching almost 40% and sectarian violence was spiraling out of control. They began a youth ministry to street kids and a senior citizens ministry that brought Catholics and Protestants together. They founded a job center and went out on evangelistic campaigns into the neighborhoods. They showed me what it looked like to fulfill Jesus' directive that his followers be like "salt" scattered throughout the earth to preserve the planet against further decay and like "light" that pushes back the darkness that overhangs too many places. They pictured the ACTING FAITH stage of the spiritual journey and led me into that season myself.

Use Your GIFTS Obediently

Jesus once said that just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for many, the mark of maturing discipleship isn't how many worship services or Bible studies you attend; it's what you do with what you know. It's how actively you serve God by serving others. (Matt 20:26-28). In the lesson from Luke's gospel that we read earlier, we see Jesus sending his disciples out to do just this. Up to this point the disciples have just watched as Jesus did battle with evil and healed the hurting and proclaimed what life looks like when his Heavenly Father, the King, is shining through it. Now, Jesus tells his disciples to go out and do likewise. Luke 9:1 reads: **"When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and**



ACTING FAITH

What You Do With What You Know

Text: Luke 9:1-17; Luke 10:1-24

authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." Those first disciples obey Christ's commission and are amazed at how the power of God moves through them.

Sometimes, I think that we just don't realize what power and authority Christ has given us as his disciples today. Maybe this little acrostic can help us see this. God has given to each of us particular grace-gifts – what 1 Corinthians 12 calls "spiritual gifts" that are intended to be used to serve his kingdom's purposes. He's given you particular insights he means for you to share with others. God has provided you with a unique form too – a personality, temperament, and fruit of his Spirit that he has endowed you with for the blessing of the people around you. Even if you are economically hard-pressed right now, you possess financial and physical treasure – resources that he has entrusted to you for the extension of his kingdom. He has given you skills that people in your family, your church, your community or some other workplace needs to meet needs that God has put you there as his servant to meet.

It's hard to see this, I grant you. The reason why Acting Faith takes so long to establish itself in our lives is because we're so conscious of what we don't have and of what we apparently cannot do. We keep waiting for that day out there someplace when we'll finally be ready for a more active faith. It was like this for the first disciples too. Luke 9:12 reads: **"Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here... 'We have only five loaves of bread and two fish..¹⁴ (About five thousand men were there.)** How often, I wonder, does the "I have only" mentality cage you or me?

But Jesus replies, I have given you power and authority to act in my name: ¹³**"You give them something to eat."** And scripture records, that **"the disciples did so... and all ate and were satisfied."** What if WE did so? On the stained glass window at the front of our Sanctuary are emblazoned many of the simple direct commandments of Jesus. Jesus says: love, forgive, pray, confess, honor, comfort, trust, give. What if each of us picked just one of those words and said to God, "Lord, I am going to act on that command. I'm not going to just contemplate it, talk about it, study it, wait for others to get moving on it; I'm going to do it, myself, starting today." Is it possible that God would add to that obedience the power of heaven to multiply the impact of that choice? He's done it before. And I am convinced that God wants to do it again and again.

Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher and theologian, once wrote: "The highest of all is not to understand the highest but to act upon it." **"For we are God's workmanship,"** declares St. Paul, **"created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"** (Ephesians 2:10). **"For the**



ACTING FAITH

What You Do With What You Know

Text: Luke 9:1-17; Luke 10:1-24

kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power” (1 Corinthians 4:20).

Where does your faith and mine, need to progress from the stage of contemplation and conversation to the stage of action and power?