
NO MORE SHEEP HOLDING PENS
3 Years and Out!
THE SHEEPFOLD
JOHN 10:9
CAREER
SUCCESS
INFLUENCE
WEALTH
ENTERTAINMENT
FREEDOM
YOUR WAY
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW
MORE
FASTER
BIGGER
BETTER
ALL ARE WELCOME
SAME OLD WORLD
INTO ALL THE WORLD
MARK 16:15
RICKY KROEGER

Author of *The Once and Future Church*, *Gravitas*, *Life, Love, Leading*, *Be a Part of the Solution*, *No More Sheep Holding Pens* and *Satan Away*



Ricky Kroeger has spent more than 40 years consulting with organizations in 20 countries across five continents. He has served as a pastor, executive pastor and elder, and participated in two church plants. He is the founder of One Kingdom Worldwide.

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Comfortable in the pen?

Every day in the USA, 16 churches close their doors for the last time.

Within three years, Jesus' talmidim were ready to follow him out into the world. Today we keep people in for decades: safe, fed and comfortable, but rarely becoming more and more like him.

No More Sheep Holding Pens calls church leaders, and the sheep who feel stuck, back to The Way Jesus lived, and to the Good Shepherd who leads his sheep out through the open gate, into all the world.

No More Sheep Holding Pens

3 Years and Out!

Ricky Kroeger

One Kingdom Worldwide

No More Sheep Holding Pens:
3 Years and Out!
Ricky Kroeger
One Kingdom Worldwide
OneKingdomWorldwide.org
The Community Service and Support Network
CSASNetwork.org

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Ricky Kroeger has spent more than 40 years consulting with organizations in 20 countries across five continents. He has also been a pastor, an executive pastor, an elder and has participated in two church plants. He is the author of:

The Once and Future Church: Returning the Church to the Way Jesus Left It

Gravitas: Reimagining the Sunday Lecture Model - Restoring Jesus' Conversational Model

Life: Living The Good Life God Offers Us (Revealing The Deception As Old As Time Itself)

Love: "Lord, teach us how to pray." Contemplations on the Prayers Jesus Taught Us

Leading: Uniting God's People to More Productive Service

Be a Part of the Solution: How to Start a Community Service and Support Network in Your Town or City

No More Sheep Holding Pens: 3 Years and Out!

Satan Away: Your Self, My Self or Our Selves

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How to Read This Book

This is a short book with a simple question in it. What if our churches stopped trying to hold people in, and opened the gates so that every one of us would become more and more useful to God - wherever he may be leading us?

Please do not read it alone. Read a chapter, then gather your elders, your staff, your small group, or the handful of people God has already put around you, and talk about it. At the end of every chapter you will find a few Questions for Your Twelve. They are not a test. They are conversation starters, the kind of questions the rabbis and their talmidim (what we errantly call disciples) would have wrestled with together on the Sabbath in Galilee.

The book has four parts. Part One looks honestly at the sheep holding pens we have built, and at the three years Jesus took to make talmidim who were ready to be sent. Part Two looks at The Way he taught us to live, and at the one thing that he said that no religion ever has. Part Three is the heart of this book. It begins with the four prayers Jesus told us to pray, and then turns to a handful of additional prayers I pray every day: Order my steps, O God. BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds. O Lord, that I be like that horse under you! Orchestrate, integrate and unite your people, O God! Part Four imagines what sheepfold churches with open gates could look like, for leaders and for the sheep who feel stuck.

You will hear me refer to four posters: Jesus' Attitudes That Bless, the Fruit of the Spirit, the Manipulate-to-Control Relationship Busters, and True Talmidim Will Evidence. They are reproduced in Appendix A, and they are free to download and print at OneKingdomWorldwide.org. Put them on the wall wherever you talk about following Jesus in The Way he said to live a life pleasing to God. Keep them on your phone and refer to them often.

Disagree with me where you need to. Iron sharpens iron. Just do it in the attitudes of Jesus, and you will already be practicing what this book is about.

Preface

Not long ago I recorded a short video with a question in it. "Do you have Ezekiel 34:1-16 memberships, or Jesus' way of sending ships?"

I have not been able to stop thinking about that question since.

For years now we have been closing 16 churches every day here in the USA. I have walked through some of those empty buildings. I have talked with the pastors who turned out the lights for the last time. Most of them were faithful, hard-working people. They did not fail for lack of effort. They inherited a model, the same model most of us inherited, and that model was never designed to release anyone to follow the Shepherd wherever he leads.

Here is what I mean. Within three years, Jesus' talmidim were ready to be sent out in twos. They went, and they came back excited, having found out *that they really were ready*, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The twelve he focused on led to the seventy, and the seventy to the five hundred. Then they went everywhere.

We, on the other hand, have learned to keep people in for decades. We baptize, but we do not make talmidim. We fill the seats, meet the budget, and hope that people grow. Without ever meaning to, we have built what God described through the prophet Ezekiel: places where the sheep are held, but the weak are not strengthened, the strayed are not brought back, and the lost are not sought.

So this book has a strong title. *No More Sheep Holding Pens. 3 Years and Out!*

I want to be very careful with that title, because it is not a call to empty the churches or to kick anyone out. It is a call to do what Jesus did. Gather people close. Walk with them life-on-life. Teach them *how* to live a life pleasing to God, support it with scripture, and help *them* become *more and more* like him. Within three years or so, he released them from the pen, individually in their daily lives, in twos and in teams, to go do the same with others.
As a tentmaker, Paul did the same thing. Biblical scholars identify that

Paul would start a fellowship and leave them within three years or even much less. Even when he circled back during his travels, the total time he spent in any one community was almost always less than three years.

That is the outside of this book. The inside of it is something more personal.

Jesus told us to pray four prayers. I do, and they are included here in Chapter Five. However, over the last many years, God has also been teaching me to pray another handful of simple prayers, every day, all day long: Order my steps, O God; BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds; Orchestrate, integrate and unite your people to *more* productive service, O God. And one day, while watching a video of a woman, winning a national championship in an arena, ride a horse with no bridle and no bit in its mouth, I found myself in tears praying, "O Lord, that I be like that horse under you!" You will read about that day in Chapter Eight.

I have come to believe that those prayers are the real answer to the sheep pen. A pen is how you hold sheep *in*. Jesus did not need one. His sheep continued to hear his voice long after his resurrection and ascension, and they followed him out into the world. When his people learn to be led by the Spirit of the living God the way he was, moment by moment, there is no need to hold anyone in. *He* can send them. He *will* send them. If we will overcome the division tearing our nation apart, we must *GO as He went and sent!*

I have spent more than 40 years consulting with organizations in 20 countries across five continents. I have been a pastor, an executive pastor, an elder, and part of two church plants. I have made all the mistakes in the world. What follows is what God and the many wise counselors he has put in my path have taught me about sheepfolds without gates.

May it help you. Lord of the harvest send out laborers into your harvest!

Ricky Kroeger

Part One: The Pen

Why We Hold Them In

CHAPTER ONE

No More Sheep Holding Pens: Ezekiel 34:1-16

There is a passage I believe every church leader should read slowly, on their knees. I have read it many times now, and it still stops me.

Ezekiel 34:1-16

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed

themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

The Lord God Will Seek Them Out

"For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

God was not pleased with the shepherds. They lived as though the sheep were there to feed *them*. They did not strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed or seek the lost. And with force and harshness they ruled them. So God said he would require his sheep at their hand, rescue them from their mouths, and shepherd them *himself*. Later, Jesus arrived to begin doing just that.

* * *

Shepherds Who Feed Themselves

Let me say something clearly before we go any further. Most of the pastors I know are nothing like the shepherds of Ezekiel 34. They are sacrificial and kind. Many of them are underpaid and overworked. They love their people, and they have given their lives to serve them.

But I have come to believe that our *model* has drifted in Ezekiel's direction, even when our *hearts* have not. And the Enemy is winning far too frequently.

Think about how most of our churches measure a good year. Attendance is up. Giving is up. Membership is up. The building is full and the budget is met. None of those things are bad. But every one of them measures how many sheep are *in*. Not one of them measures how many have been made ready and are *out making talmidim who are making talmidim who are making talmidim*.

When the health of the organization depends on keeping people in, the organization will, without ever deciding to, begin to feed itself on the sheep. Their time feeds the programs. Their giving feeds the building and the staff. Their attendance feeds the numbers we report. And the sheep themselves? Too often the weak are not strengthened. Too often, 10, 20 and even 30 years later, people are stuck in the same patterns they walked in with. In *Leading*, I shared that 45% of the people we need for active service are sitting inactive. They are in the pen. They are not walking the pasture.

That is what I mean by a sheep holding pen. A membership church business that tries to hold people *in*.

* * *

What a Sheep Pen Is For

Now, a sheep pen is not a bad thing. In Jesus' day, shepherds brought their flocks into a sheepfold at night. Often it was a simple enclosure of stone with one opening, and the shepherd himself might lie across the gap, so that nothing could get in without going through him. It was a place of safety and rest.

But no shepherd ever meant for his sheep to *live* in the pen. The pen is where they spend the night. The pasture is where they may be found *following* the shepherd. Listen to how Jesus described what a good shepherd does.

John 10:2-4

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

He calls them by name and *leads* them *out*. He goes before them, and they follow him.

John 10:9-10

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

In *and* out. Not just in. The abundant life Jesus came to give is not found by sitting in the fold. It is found out in the pasture, following the Shepherd.

We still need to gather. Scripture is clear about that. But the gathering was never meant to be the destination. It is the sabbath rest between days of following him in the pasture.

* * *

Membership or Open Gates?

Here is the hard question. Is your church built to hold people in, or to share a view of what is beyond the open gate, that they *follow the Shepherd* out?

You can usually tell by what makes a leader nervous. In a holding church, the thing that makes us nervous is people leaving. In an open-gate church, the thing that makes us nervous is people staying *in*, staying the same.

In a holding church, the best members are the ones who have been here the longest. In an open-gate church, the best talmidim are the ones who have gone on to make other talmidim.

In a holding church, the pastor does most of the talking, and the people do most of the listening, for decades. In an open-gate church, the people are being trained to hear Yahweh for themselves, to only say and do what he gives them to say and do, and *to take that out into their homes, their workplaces and their communities*.

I am not saying this to shame anyone. Shame is one of the Relationship Busters you'll hear more about, and I have no interest in using it. I am saying it because I believe most of us never *chose* the holding model. *We inherited it.* It came to us through the European homiletic tradition, the Hellenistic lecture model, in which one person speaks and everyone else listens. It built the magnificent cathedrals of Europe, which now stand largely empty. And here in the USA, following in that model, we are closing 16 churches every day. It is not the model the Father prepared 100 years in advance in Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida - for the Son's use.

We did not lose the faith. *We lost the model.* (Read the free book: *The Once and Future Church*. Available at OneKingdomWorldwide.org.)

* * *

The Shepherd's Heart

What does God want from the shepherds of his people? Peter, who had been told three times by Jesus to feed his sheep, put it this way.

> **1 Peter 5:2-3**
>
> *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

Not domineering. Not with force and harshness. By being examples. That is the opposite of Ezekiel 34. And it is exactly what Jesus did. He did not rule his talmidim. He walked with them, showed them, talked with them, and then released them. The Greek word Peter used is hupogrammos. It literally means "writing under." In Peter's day, a scribe would write out the letters, and a child learning to write would lay a blank sheet over the top and trace over them, again and again, until they

could make an exact copy.
That is what Jesus left *us* to be. Not an example to admire from a distance, but the original to trace. Line by line, day by day, we lay our lives over his, until our words and actions more and more take on the shape of his. He alone is the original, the Son of God. But we are to be being shaped into a faithful copy, becoming more and more *like* him.

* * *

The Lord God Will Seek Them Out

Notice the turn in the middle of the Ezekiel passage. After all the warnings, God says, "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out."

That is good news. It means this book is not finally about what we must do. It is about what God is already doing. He is seeking out his scattered sheep. He is gathering them from wherever they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

And then, some six centuries later, a young rabbi from Nazareth stood up and said,

> **John 10:11**
>
> *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

The Shepherd God promised through Ezekiel came. He gathered twelve around himself. He walked them through the towns of Galilee. And within three years, he sent them out. He is leading *us* out, too, into good pasture among his scattered sheep.

The question for us is simple. Will we keep building pens that tend to hold people *in*? Or will we join the Good Shepherd for the *leading of his sheep out to pasture?*

* * *

Yahweh, you are the Shepherd of your people, and I am not. Forgive us where we have held your sheep in for our own sake. Give us the shepherd's heart that Jesus displayed: not domineering, but an

example to the flock of The Way your Son trained us up to live. Search for your sheep through us. Strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed and seek the lost. And lead us out, Lord, to follow you in good pasture. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16 aloud together. Which phrase stops you the most, and why?
2. How does our church measure a good year? How many of those measures count people *in*, and how many count people made ready and *out*, following the Shepherd wherever he leads?
3. What makes you more nervous: people leaving, or people staying?
4. Jesus said the sheep "will go in *and* out and find pasture." Where is the pasture for the people God has given us?
5. If the Lord of the harvest is already seeking out his scattered sheep, where do you see him doing that around us right now? Where should we be participating with him according to *his* leading?

CHAPTER TWO

3 Years and Out!

Read this verse slowly. It is the job description Jesus gave himself for his twelve.

> **Mark 3:14**
>
> *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach*

Two things, in this order. First, that they might be *with him*. Then, that he might *send them out*.

With him, then sent. That was the plan from the very first day. Jesus never intended to keep his talmidim around him forever. He called them close so that he could send them far.

* * *

Within Three Years

It did not take decades. Somewhere around the middle of his ministry, Jesus sent the twelve out on their own.

> **Mark 6:7**
>
> *And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.*

Then he did it again with a larger group.

> **Luke 10:1**
>
> *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.*

(Some ancient manuscripts say seventy, which is how I have always referred to them. Either way, the point is the same.)

And they came back amazed.

> **Luke 10:17**
>
> *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"*

Notice their words: "in your name." Soon after Eden, what we have translated as "name" meant "presence." The evolution from the Hebrew words panim and shem is described in great detail in my *Life* and *Love* books. In this case, name *also* means: the character, the authority and the reliable activity of the one named. The seventy did not cast out a single demon on their own. They did not heal a single person by their own power. God did those things *through* them, in his presence, *as they only said and did what he gave them to say and do*.

And Jesus made sure they understood that.

> **Luke 10:20**
>
> *Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*

Their joy was not to be in what God had done through them, but in *whose they were*.

They found out *they really were ready* to be useful to God. Not because they had finished a curriculum. Not because they had memorized the right answers. They were ready because they had been *with* Jesus, watching *how* he lived, listening to *how* he talked with people, learning to only say and do what *the Father* gave them, and to see what the Father was doing and do likewise.

Within three years, Jesus had prepared a group of ordinary fishermen, a tax collector and a handful of others to carry his kingdom to the world. The twelve multiplied into the seventy. The seventy into the five hundred.

> **1 Corinthians 15:6**
>
> *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*

Then three thousand were awakened on Pentecost, and they went everywhere.

* * *

Ready to Be a Rabbi

In Jesus' day, this was not unusual. It was what a talmid lived for.

A talmid was not simply a student who learned what the rabbi knew. A talmid was someone in the process of *becoming more and more just like their rabbi*: in his character, in his attitudes, in the way he treated people, in the way he walked with God. And after a few years, a talmid was expected to be ready to become a rabbi himself, and to gather talmidim of his own. Walking in The Way.

Jesus said it plainly.

> **Luke 6:40**
> *A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.*

Fully trained, like his teacher. Not fully informed. *Like* him.

And the people around them noticed.

> **Acts 4:13**
> *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*

No seminary degree. No ordination certificate. Just the unmistakable mark of having been with Jesus. That is what three years of life-on-life, conversational learning with the Rabbi produced.

* * *

By This Time You Ought to Be Teachers

Now compare that with what we see in so many churches.

I often ask pastors a simple question. "Can you name ten people in your congregation who are becoming more and more like Jesus this year?

How about three? Not attending more. Not serving more. Actually *becoming* more like him."

Every time I ask it, the room goes quiet.

Not because they don't care. They care deeply. It's because *the model* we have been given does not have *becoming* built into it. It has *information*. It has activity. It has attendance. But *becoming* requires something different. It requires The Way Jesus did it.

One pastor told me, "Rick, now I understand the difference between a disciple and a talmid. I've been at this for 20 years, and I don't think I have made 10 talmidim." He was not a bad pastor. He was an honest one. And his honesty is the beginning of the answer.

> **Hebrews 5:12**
>
> *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,*

By this time you ought to be teachers. That verse convicts me every time I read it. How many of our people, after 10, 20 or 30 years of faithful attendance, are still being fed milk from the front, and have never once followed the Good Shepherd out into the pasture area *he designed for them before they were born?*

* * *

What "Out" Does Not Mean

Let me be very careful here, because the subtitle of this book could easily be misunderstood.

"3 Years and Out" does not mean we push people out the door. It does not mean they stop gathering. Scripture is clear that we need each other.

> **Hebrews 10:24-25**
>
> *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

The twelve did not stop meeting together when Jesus sent them out. They went out in twos, they came back and reported, they gathered and prayed, and they went out again. People who are out following the Shepherd remain connected people.

"Out" means being useful to God in your daily life, moment by moment, according to his leading, and *wherever* he may be leading. It means that after about three years of walking closely with Jesus, alongside a few mature talmidim who are a little further along The Way, a talmid will be ready to do for others what was done for them. To be meeting with *at least one other person*, and for some to be gathering their own twelve or so. To lead a home community. To serve in passion-aligned ministry *in* the community. To *go* to the neighborhood, workplace or a nation that God puts on their heart.

Some of them will stay right where they are and walk as mature talmidim alongside the next group. Some will do so with a neighbor or co-worker. Some will go across town. Some will go across the world. Some, like Paul, will take a job and make tents.

> **Acts 18:3**
> *and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.*

Paul succeeded in going out as a tentmaker. As a tentmaker, Paul did the same thing Jesus did. Biblical scholars identify that Paul would start a fellowship and leave them within three years, and in many cases much less. Even when he circled back during his travels, the *total time* he spent in any one community was almost always less than three years.
Why can't our people?

* * *

What If Sundays Were About Training?

So here is the question I want to leave with you.

What if Sundays, and everything else we do, were all about training up talmidim within three years in preparation for what God has had in mind for them since before they were born?

Jesus did it without a building and without a staff. And he did it before Pentecost. Now we have the Holy Spirit living in us to help. Why should we expect anything less?

What if our financial gifts were used to draw more and more people in for their three years of training, and then to release them to follow the Good Shepherd out, rather than to hold them in? What if we celebrated every talmid's release from the pen the way we celebrate a building dedication? What if the measure of a church was not how many it seats, but how many are actively talmidim who are making talmidim who are making talmidim?

Jesus looked at the crowds and saw what Ezekiel saw.

> **Matthew 9:36-38**
>
> *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

Sheep without a shepherd. And his answer was not to build a bigger pen. His answer was to pray for laborers to be sent. Then, in the very next chapter, he sent the twelve.

* * *

Lord Jesus, you called your talmidim to be with you so that you could send them out. Call us close to you, and then send us. Make us people who are fully trained and becoming more and more like you. Lord of the harvest, send out laborers into your harvest, that some of them be the very people sitting next to me now. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Mark 3:14 says Jesus called the twelve "so that they might be with him and he might send them out." Which of those two do we do better? Which do we do less well?

2. Can you name ten people among us who are becoming more and more like Jesus this year? How about three? *How* are we helping them?
3. What would a person need to have learned, and *become*, to be ready after three years or so to be useful to God wherever he leads?
4. What fears come up when you hear "3 Years and Out"? How might people who are out following the Shepherd remain *connected* people?
5. If our church were measured not by how many it seats, but by how many of its people are out making talmidim who are making talmidim, what would we change first?

Part Two: The Way

What Everyone Agrees On, and What Only One Person Ever Said

CHAPTER THREE

"The Way" All Agree Upon

Over more than 40 years I have worked in 20 countries on five continents, and along the way I have met people of all the various religions - and Christians of more denominations than I can count.

And I have come to know this.

All of the major religions of the world agree about one thing. If you will live your life in The Way that Jesus described, your life and the lives of those around you will be better.

Think about that. Whether people believe he was a great prophet, a great teacher, or the Son of God himself, and I do, they agree on this much. Live the way he said to live, and life gets better. For you, and for everyone around you.

That is a remarkable thing. It means that the way Jesus taught us to live is not a narrow, private, Christians-only matter. It is the way life works best. It is how the Creator of the universe designed human beings to live together.

* * *

Followers of The Way

After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, his followers were not first known as a religion. They were known as followers of The Way.

> **Acts 9:2**
>
> *and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

The Way. The way to live a life pleasing to God. The name "Christians" came later, first given to them at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Before that, people simply recognized them by *how they lived.*

Jesus had told them,

> **John 14:6**
> *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*
> *No one comes to the Father except through me.*

The way, the truth and the life. Notice which comes first. In Jesus' day, the role of a rabbi was to teach people *how* to live a life pleasing to God. And Jesus did not just teach the way. He *was* The Way. He walked it in front of them, every day, for three years.

* * *

Simple to Understand, Difficult to Do

So what is The Way? It's really quite simple to understand, although really quite difficult to do.

First, walk in Jesus' attitudes. In Matthew 5, Jesus gives us the Beatitudes, which are actually the attitudes he walked around in: humble, comforted in mourning, meek (not weak), hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, rejoicing even when persecuted. He described himself in those same words: "I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Second, monitor yourself for fruit of the Spirit results. If we will more and more walk in his attitudes, we will more and more be producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and perseverance, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), in our language and in our actions.

Third, never use manipulate-to-control strategies with people. Judgment, anger, accusation, condemnation, shaming, threats, coercion, retaliation, going silent, abuse of power. The more we walk in his attitudes and produce fruit of the Spirit, the less we will try to pressure and control people. Because God just never does that.

2 Corinthians 3:17

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, God has never tried to control us. He simply provides us information, reminds us that our choices have consequences, and lets us choose what we will do. Then he allows the good and the bad consequences of our decisions to play out. You see it in Exodus 20, Exodus 34, Numbers 14 and Deuteronomy 5. "If you rob that bank, you will go to prison" is not a threat. It is information. God informs. He never controls.

Those three things are the first three posters in Appendix A. Attitudes that bless. Fruit of the Spirit. The Relationship Busters. The Way. Simple to understand. Difficult to do. And the most difficult part is that we cannot do it on our own.

* * *

The *How* Before the What

Here is something that has been lost.

For centuries now, the church has argued mostly about *what*. What to believe. What a verse means. What our denomination holds that theirs does not. We have now become more than 250 denominations here in the USA, and most of our divisions come down to, "I know better than you. We know better than they know."

But in Jesus' day, the rabbi's first job was the *how*. *How* to live a life pleasing to God. *How* do you treat your neighbor, your enemy, your wife, your children? *How* do you talk to someone who disagrees with you? *How* do you handle money, power and anger?

The *what* matters. It comes after the *how*, and it is supported by Scripture. But when we focus on the what and lose the how, we can be completely right and completely *unlike* Jesus at the same time.

That is why I like to say we need fewer Bible studies and more Jesus studies, supported by the Bible. Like the two on the road to Emmaus,

our hearts burn when the Scriptures are opened up to us - around the person of Jesus and The Way he lived.

* * *

Strict Adherence

The Hebrew people of Jesus' day did not have a word for "religion." In English, the noun didn't appear until around AD 1200, long after we had divided ourselves into so many belief systems that we needed a name for them. What they *did* have was a word for being *religious*: observant, conscientious, strictly adhering.

Now read James with that in mind.

> **James 1:26-27**
>
> *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

Strict adherence that is pure and undefiled is not loyalty to a party or a denomination. It is a bridled tongue, caring for those in need, and walking in the ways of Jesus.

If your church helps you follow The Way, be sure to keep going. If it is mostly about following people in order to follow God, ask him what he would have you do about that.

* * *

Love or Not Love

When I travel and talk with people of other faiths, I find that I do not need to win an argument. I need to walk in The Way. It's okay to agree to disagree about things, and it is important to consider others' views. But quality, discussive relationships are most important. Division is caused when we argue about who is right. Whoever wins, *we* lose.

There is only God and not God. Love and not love. In the end, it is not mostly about who is right. It is about love or not love.

And here is where the story turns. Because if every religion agrees that The Way of Jesus makes life better, then the most important question is not whether his way is good. Everyone agrees that it is.

The most important question is *how* anyone could possibly *live* it.

Jesus answered that question too. And his answer is something that no other teacher, of any religion, has ever said. That is the next chapter.

* * *

Father, thank you that The Way of your Son is the way life works best. Forgive me for the times I have argued about the what and neglected the how. Teach me to walk in his attitudes, to produce fruit of your Spirit, and to set down every manipulate-to-control strategy. Make me a follower of The Way, so that the people around me find their lives better because I am with them. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Have you seen that people of many faiths agree that Jesus' way of living makes life better? Where?
2. Jesus' first followers were called followers of The Way. If we were known only by *how* we live, what would people call us?
3. Of the three parts of The Way (his attitudes, the fruit of the Spirit, and no manipulate-to-control strategies), which comes most naturally to you? Which is hardest?
4. Where have we been completely right and still not much like Jesus?
5. Read James 1:26-27 again, thinking "strict adherence" where it says "religion." What does pure and undefiled strict adherence look like in our town?

CHAPTER FOUR

But Only One Person Ever Said This

All the religions of the world agree that if you live your life in The Way that Jesus described, your life and the lives of those around you will be better.

But none of the world's religions say this. Only one person ever has.

> **John 5:19**
>
> *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."*

> **John 12:49-50**
>
> *For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.*

I only say and do what the Father gives me to say and do. I see what the Father is doing and do likewise.

Think about how unusual that is. The great teachers of history have given us wise sayings, good rules, and paths of discipline. Many of them have pointed beyond themselves to God, or to a higher way. But I have never found another who said, "I do nothing on my own. Moment by moment, I watch my Father and do what he is doing. Every word I say, he gives me to say."

That is not a rule. It is a relationship.

* * *

Not a Teacher of Rules

If Jesus had only been a great moral teacher, he would have given us a better list. And then he would have left us alone to try to keep it.

Instead, he showed us something completely different. He showed us a Son living in moment-by-moment *oneness* with his Father.

> **John 8:28-29**
>
> *So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."*

> **John 14:10**
>
> *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.*

The Father who dwells in me does his works. Jesus did not live The Way by gritting his teeth. He lived it by staying connected. Watching. Listening. Following.

That is the answer to the question at the end of the last chapter. *How* could anyone possibly live The Way? Not by trying harder to keep the rules. By *living* the way Jesus lived: in conversation with the Father all day long, only saying and doing what he gives us to say and do.

* * *

And He Says, "Come, *Become* Like Me"

Here is the astonishing part. Jesus did not say, "This is how *I* live, and you never will." He told his talmidim they could live the *same* way.

> **John 14:12**
>
> *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.*

And that is the whole point of being a talmid. Remember, a talmid is someone in the process of becoming *more and more* like their rabbi. Jesus' talmidim were not only to learn what he knew, or only to do what he did. They were to *become* more and more like him. To live connected to the Father the way he was.

John, who walked with Jesus for those three years, put it plainly later in his life.

> **1 John 2:3-6**
>
> *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

That is a sobering verse for a talmid. If I say that I am becoming more and more *like* him, people should be able to see it in how I walk.

* * *

More and More Like Him

Let me be very clear about one thing here. Jesus is the Son of God, and we are not. What we are becoming is more and more like *him*. We reflect his image. We do not replace his identity.

> **Romans 8:29**
>
> *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Little by little, success by success, glory by glory. Conformed to the image of his Son.

Peter uses a wonderful word for this. He writes that Christ suffered for us, "leaving you an *example*, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). As stated previously, the Greek word for *example* there is *hupogrammos*. It was the word for the model letters a child would trace over when learning to write. Jesus is not merely an example for us to consider. He is the *original*, and we are learning to trace over his life, line by line, *until our life begins to look more and more like his*.

* * *

Why This Changes the Pen

Now we can see why the sheep pen will never produce talmidim.

A pen can hold people who know *about* Jesus. A lecture can give people information *about* The Way. But only a living relationship with Yahweh, learned life-on-life from someone further along The Way, can produce people who only say and do what the Father gives them to say and do.

And here is the beautiful thing. People like that do not need to be held in. They do not need to be managed, motivated or monitored by an organization. They are being led by Yahweh himself. They can be useful to God anywhere he may lead them, because the One they are following goes with them.

That is how Jesus could send ordinary fishermen out in twos after so short a time. He was not sending them out alone. He was sending them out the way he himself had been sent: *watching the Father, and doing likewise.*

John 20:21

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

So the real question of this book is not, "How do we get people out of the pen?" It is, "How do we, and our people, learn to live the way Jesus lived: watching the Father and led by the Spirit moment by moment?"

That is what Part Three is about. It begins with the four prayers Jesus told us to pray, and then turns to the additional prayers I pray every day.

* * *

Father, your Son only said and did what you gave him to say and do. As his talmid, I want to live more and more just like that. Forgive me for the times I have tried to live your way on my own strength. Teach me and train me to watch you, to listen for you, and to follow you, so that I walk in the same way in which Jesus walked. Conform me to the image of your Son, more and more, glory by glory. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Why do you think no other teacher has ever said what Jesus said in John 5:19 and John 12:49-50?
2. What is the difference between keeping a list of good rules and living in moment-by-moment relationship with Yahweh? Where do you see that difference in your own life?
3. "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." Where have people seen that in your walk this week? Where have they not?
4. The hupogrammos was a model letter that a child traced over. What part of Jesus' life are you learning to trace over right now?
5. Why would people who are led by Yahweh not need to be held in?

Part Three: The Prayers

Learning to Be Led

CHAPTER FIVE

The Four Prayers Jesus Told Us to Pray

If we want to be led the way Jesus was led, we begin where he told us to begin. With prayer. The Hebrew word for prayer means *conversational worship*.

By the time his talmidim asked him to teach them how to pray, he had already told them a few other things that a talmid will desire and be conversationally asking of God. Jesus specifically told them (and us) to pray these four prayers:

- Luke 18:1-8 *Persevere in asking for justice against our adversaries.*
- Matthew 5:43-46 *Love your enemies - pray for those who persecute you.*
- Matthew 9:35-38 *Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*
- Matthew 6:9-14 *Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done…*

I pray these four prayers every day. They are not the only prayers I pray, but they come first, because they are the ones he told us to pray. Everything else in this part of the book grows out of them.

* * *

Justice Against Our Adversaries

Luke 18:1-8

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor

respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Always pray and do not lose heart. Persevere.

Notice that justice here does not mean that we take matters into our own hands. The widow did not threaten the judge, or retaliate against her adversary. She asked, and kept asking. Justice is God's to give. Ours is to ask, persistently, and to trust him with the answer *and the timing*.

And the justice we ask for is not their destruction. It is that they would repent, turn to him, be healed and come into right relationship with him.

* * *

Pray for Those Who Persecute You

Matthew 5:43-46

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

This is the prayer that keeps our hearts clean. It is very difficult to stay angry with someone you are praying for every day. Judgment, retaliation and the desire to control them begin to fall away. In their place, the Father grows his own heart in us: a heart that makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good.

* * *

Send Out Laborers Into His Harvest

Matthew 9:35-38

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Look at who does the sending in this prayer. Not the church. Not the pastor. Not us. We pray, and the Lord of the harvest sends.

That is one of the most important things to understand about a church with open gates. We do not send people. We pray earnestly for laborers, we help one another *become more and more like Jesus*, and we trust the Lord of the harvest to lead each one of us out to the places and people he has prepared.

"Make us effective laborers, O God, and send us, too."

* * *

Pray Then Like This

Matthew 6:9-13

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

I wrote a whole book about this prayer. In *Love*, I walk through it line by line: hallowed be your presence (as mentioned in Chapter Two), your kingdom come, your will be done, our daily bread, forgiveness, temptation and deliverance. If you have not read it, I hope you will. It also includes the other three prayers he gave us for use in our *conversational worship.*

For now, notice how this prayer begins. Not with our needs, but with his presence, his kingdom and his will. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your presence. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

* * *

Conversational Worship

As we persevere in asking God for people every day, we must remember the true meaning of the word *prayer* in the original Hebrew: conversational worship. When we contemplate the depth of these four prayers together, remembering to listen and praise as well, he will more and more give us hearts after himself and a better comprehension of his ways.

I am in conversational worship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit throughout each day, often asking him for the people I know and the populations of this world many times throughout the day. I change up the order of these four prayers all the time, but here is how they often sound when I pray them together:

Dear God,

Give us justice against our adversaries. Send Your laborers and draw them into Your harvest. Bind and loose according to Your will. May they repent, turn to You, be healed and come into right relationship with You. That they live the abundant life You have in mind for them both here and eternally.

Make us effective laborers, O God, and send us, too. Lead us into repentance, too. Refine us, strengthen us and sanctify us that our hearts be fully after Yours and accomplish all Your will for us.

Deliver us from evil, and deliver us from the evil we would do if we were to enter into the temptations around us. Forgive us when we fail You, O God, and use these to train us up in preparation against future temptations. Recognizing Your forgiveness for us, lead us that we learn to forgive others in the same way You forgive:

without shaming, but in Gentleness with Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Perseverance and Self-Control.

May all the people of the world be fed today. Not just with food and water, but with the filling of Your Spirit. That they become faithful followers accomplishing Your will for them.

Thank You that Your kingdom is in the process of coming across the whole world. Accomplish Your will today, on earth as it is in heaven! Hallowed and glorious is Your presence! There is no one like You. You are our Father! You are preparing our place with You for all eternity! Hallelujah! All praise and glory and honor are Yours forever and ever, amen!

Such a brief and simple prayer. Yet it encompasses the whole world!

* * *

My Additional Prayers

Over the years, God has also been teaching me to pray a handful of additional prayers, every day, all day long. They do not replace the four prayers Jesus told us to pray. They grow out of them. They are the prayers of someone asking, moment by moment, to be led.

Order my steps, O God.

BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds.

O Lord, that I be like that horse under you!

Orchestrate, integrate and unite your people to *more* productive service, O God!

The next four chapters are about these additional prayers.

* * *

Father, give us justice against our adversaries; may they repent, turn to you and be healed. Teach us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Lord of the harvest, send out laborers into

your harvest, and make us effective laborers, too. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your presence. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Had you known that Jesus specifically told us to pray these four prayers? Which of them do you pray most often? Which least often?
2. Who is your adversary right now? What would it look like to persevere in asking God for justice, meaning also for their repentance and healing?
3. Who is the person you find hardest to pray for? What happens in your heart when you pray for them every day?
4. In the prayer for laborers, the Lord of the harvest does the sending. How does that change the way we think about our people going out?
5. Try praying the four prayers together every day this week, in your own words. Come back and share what happened.

CHAPTER SIX

Order My Steps, O God

Every morning I begin the same way. Before the phone, before the news, before the day's list starts talking to me, I ask God to order my steps. And I ask him to orchestrate and integrate me with those he would have me serve today.

It is a simple prayer. But it changes the whole day.

It means I am not the one in charge of my day. He is. It means the people I meet are not interruptions to my plans. They may well be *his* plans. And it means I am going to spend the day watching *to see what he is doing*, so I can join him in it.

> **Psalm 119:133**
>
> *Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.*

Older translations put the first line this way: "Order my steps in thy word." That is where my morning prayer comes from. Order my steps, O God.

* * *

The Lord Establishes His Steps

The Scriptures are full of this idea. We make plans. God orders the steps.

> **Proverbs 16:9**
>
> *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.*

> **Psalm 37:23**
>
> *The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way;*

Jeremiah 10:23

I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

It is not in man who walks to direct his steps. Jeremiah understood something that most of us take a lifetime to learn. We were not designed to run our own lives. We were designed to be led.

That does not mean we stop planning. Planning is good. It means we hold our plans with an open hand. We bring them to God in conversational worship and say, "Here is what I am thinking. Is this the way? Order my steps." And then we watch for his answer, which often comes through circumstances and through the people he places around us.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

* * *

Is It Mine to Do?

When I ask God to order my steps, one of the first things he does is help me answer a question each of us must learn to ask. Is this *mine* to do? To say? Or not?

One of the ways of the Enemy is to make us think, "Somebody's got to do it. You had better step in there and get it done." But that is not the way God works. I see all kinds of things wrong in this world, and there is no way I can address them all. Neither can you.

So my first response is conversational worship *for* them. "Father, you are God. I am not. Help me know what is mine, and help me know what is not mine." Just as Jesus focused on the twelve, he will focus me on what is mine. His yoke is easy, his burden light.

It is a liberating thing. When the sense comes that this situation is not mine, I do not walk away guilty, saying, "I should have, I could have." I

walk away saying, "Okay, then you must have something else for me. What's next?" He has *others* he will send to them.

That is one of the great freedoms of the talmidic life. I only have to say and do what the Father gives me to say and do – and in conversational worship be agreeing with him for those who are *not* mine.

* * *

Mile Markers in the Rear-View Mirror

I shared this story in *Leading*, but it belongs here too.

There was a time when my wife and I could have spent a lot of money helping a homeless shelter and a halfway house we cared deeply about. It was within our financial grasp. But I never sensed God saying, "Do it." The need continued, and I continued to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done in this place."

Then another person arrived on the scene. Looking in the rear-view mirror, I can see how it came to pass, step by step, mile marker by mile marker. In the end, five times more money was spent and five times more good was done. If we had done what we thought needed to be done, that person would likely have done nothing. We would have blocked their blessing, and the halfway house's blessing too.

When God orders our steps, he is also ordering the steps of others. He is orchestrating far more than we can see. We usually only recognize it looking back.

* * *

When the Road Splits

Sometimes we come to a T-intersection. We pray, we listen, and we wait for God to say left or right. And sometimes, it seems he says, "Take your pick. Either one is fine. My grace is sufficient for you."

I have learned that this, too, is God ordering my steps. He is not a puppet master. He invites us into creative collaboration with him, the way he invited Adam to name the animals. Sometimes the what is his, and the how is ours to choose *with* him. When we choose in his

attitudes and with a heart after his, his will adjusts with us and goes with us down the road we chose.

And when he does have a clear direction, he is well able to make it known. Choose wisely.

> **Isaiah 30:21**
>
> *And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.*

* * *

Timing Is the Father's

One more thing about ordered steps. They come in God's timing, not ours.

It is entirely possible to do a good thing at the wrong time. When we run ahead of God, sooner or later we will have to back up. Church, if you don't have enough money for what you are doing, it may be that you got ahead of God. Back up!

> **Ephesians 2:10**
>
> *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

The works were prepared beforehand. Our part is to walk in them, step by step, as he orders our steps.

* * *

Why This Matters for a Church With Open Gates

Here is why this prayer belongs in a book about sheep pens.

A church that holds people in usually orders some of their steps *for* them. Here is the program. Here is the class. Here is your place on the schedule. That is not wrong in itself, but it can quietly teach people that someone else is responsible for directing their lives with God.

A church with open gates teaches its people to pray, "Order my steps, O God," and then to expect an answer. It trains them to ask, "Is this mine to do?" It helps them discern, in conversation with others, what God is saying. And then it trusts God to order the steps of every one of them, wherever he may lead.

People who have never learned to be led will not find their way to the pasture. But anyone, anywhere, who has learned to let God order their steps can be useful to him, moment by moment, wherever he leads.

* * *

Order my steps, O God. Orchestrate and integrate me today with those you would have me serve. Help me know what is mine to do and what is not mine. Keep me from running ahead of you, and from lagging behind. That I hear your word behind me saying, "This is the way, walk in it." That I walk in the works you prepared beforehand for me. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. How do you begin your day? What would change if your first words each morning were "Order my steps, O God"?
2. What are you carrying right now that may not be yours to do? What would it look like to agree with him in conversational worship and set it down?
3. Looking in the rear-view mirror, where can you see that God was ordering your steps, even when you didn't know it at the time?
4. Have you come to a T-intersection where God seemed to say, "Take your pick"? How did you choose?
5. How could our church help people learn to be led by God, rather than looking to us?

CHAPTER SEVEN

BE My Thoughts, My Needs, My Words and My Deeds

There is a prayer I pray many times a day. It is very short.

BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds.

Notice the first word. I do not pray, "Give me better thoughts." I do not pray, "Help me say the right words." I pray, "*Be* my thoughts. *Be* my words."

That one word makes all the difference. "Give me" asks God to hand me something so that I can go and do it myself. "Be" asks God himself to be present in me, doing it through me. It is the prayer of someone who knows he cannot live The Way on his own.

> **Galatians 2:20**
> *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. That is what Jesus described of himself and the Father: "the Father who dwells in me does his works" (John 14:10). And it is what he prayed for us.

Let's take the prayer one part at a time.

* * *

Be My Thoughts

Everything begins in the mind. Before a word comes out of our mouth, before a deed is done, there was a thought.

And not every thought in my head is mine. I have come to recognize that there are three voices in our heads. There is my own voice. There is the voice of the Enemy, who loves to accuse, condemn and stir up fear and anger. And there is the still small voice of God.

So when I pray, "Be my thoughts," I am asking God to sort those voices for me, and to make his the one I follow.

2 Corinthians 10:5

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

1 Corinthians 2:16

For "who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

We have the mind of Christ. It is available to us. Paul tells us to live from it.

Philippians 2:5

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

When a thought comes that is full of judgment, condemnation or the need to control, I have learned to recognize it for what it is: a Relationship Buster, not Jesus' way as a peacemaker. Sometimes I simply say, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. Be gone." Not as an incantation, but as an act of surrender, in agreement with James: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Then I ask the Father again, "Be my thoughts."

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Transformed by the renewal of the mind. Little by little. Thought by thought.

* * *

Be My Needs

The second part of the prayer surprises people. "Be my needs."

Most of us spend a great deal of our thought life on our needs. Money. Health. Our children. Our future. What people think of us. Jesus knew that.

> **Matthew 6:31-33**
>
> *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

When I pray, "Be my needs," I am asking two things. First, that God would meet my needs, as he has promised.

> **Philippians 4:19**
>
> *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

But second, and more deeply, I am asking that *he* would become what I need. That my deepest need would be *him* and the accomplishment of *his will* for my life. That I would want *what he wants me to want,* and stop reaching for the things the world says I cannot live without.

"Give us this day our daily bread" echoes the manna in the wilderness. Enough for today. Daily dependence upon a present Father. When God is all I need, it frees me of anxiety. And I am more likely to be generous with others.

* * *

Be My Words

Then, "Be my words."

This is where the talmidic life becomes very visible very quickly. People cannot see my thoughts. But they hear my words.

> **Psalm 19:14**
>
> *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

Jesus said, "What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me" (John 12:50). That is the goal. Not that I would never speak, but that what I speak would come from him.

And our words are not only *what* we say. They are *how* we say it. What are your eyes, face, body language, volume and tone saying? Are you trying to threaten and intimidate, or nurture and facilitate? A *true* sentence spoken in anger is still a Relationship Buster.

So "Be my words" means: That my words carry fruit of the Spirit. That they be gentle, patient and kind. That they inform, The Way God informs, and never try to manipulate or control. That I know when to speak, and when to be silent.

James said that the tongue is like the bit in a horse's mouth (James 3:3). Remember that. We will come back to it in the next chapter.

* * *

Be My Deeds

Finally, "Be my deeds."

> **Colossians 3:17**
>
> *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Remember what "name" means. The ancient Hebrew word for presence is *panim*. Name is *shem*, and a thousand years before the time of Jesus the two had evolved to be speaking of the presence of God himself as *Hashem*, *THE* Name: his presence, his character, his attributes and his reputation for reliable activity on our behalf. To do everything in the

name of the Lord Jesus is to do everything led by his presence, in The Way, in his character, as he would do it.

"Be my deeds" asks the Father to do his works through me. It is love active in service. It is walking in the good works he prepared beforehand for me (Ephesians 2:10). And it is the most natural fruit of the other three. When God is my thoughts, my needs and my words, *my deeds begin to look more and more like his.*

* * *

All Day Long

This is not a prayer you pray once. I pray it in the morning. I pray it before a hard conversation, and I pray it in the middle of one. It is a way of staying connected to the Father through every conversation and every decision.

That is what the Hebrew understanding of prayer always was: not a list of requests, but conversational worship. "You're God. I'm not. Lead me. Guide me. Teach me. Train me. Father, do your works in me." All day long.

> **Psalm 139:23-24**
>
> *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*

* * *

Why This Matters for a Church With Open Gates

A church that holds people in can teach them to pray for things. A church with open gates teaches them to be filled with conversational worship. To ask God to be their thoughts, their needs, their words and their deeds.

People who pray that way and mean it are ready to be useful to God wherever he leads them. Not because they have all the answers, but because they have learned where the answers come from.

* * *

Father, BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds. Take every thought captive to obey your Son. BE my needs, and meet my needs as you have promised. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Do your works through me, in your presence, in your character, and to your glory. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. What is the difference between praying "Give me" and in conversational worship asking that we "Be"? Why does it matter?
2. Can you recognize the three voices in your head: your own, the Enemy's, and God's still small voice? How do you tell them apart?
3. Which need takes up the most room in your thoughts right now? What would it mean for God to "BE" that need?
4. What are your eyes, face, body language, volume and tone saying when you disagree with someone?
5. Try praying "BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds" several times a day this week. Come back and share what happened.

CHAPTER EIGHT

O Lord, That I Be Like That Horse Under You!

I did not expect to cry that day.

I was watching a YouTube video of Stacy Westfall riding in competition, winning a national championship in freestyle reining. If you have never seen it, please stop and look it up. It is only a few minutes long.

She rode in on her horse with no bridle. No bit in its mouth. No reins in her hands. And then, to music, the two of them performed together. Spins. Sliding stops. Fast circles and slow ones. Changes of direction so quick and smooth you could hardly follow them.

And I could not see her do anything.

I watched closely. I was looking for the signal, the pressure, the cue. I am sure there were small ones, a shift of weight here, a touch of the leg there. But to my eye, it was impossible to see that the rider had to *do* anything to cause the horse to do her will. It was as though the horse was reading the rider's mind.

Somewhere in the middle of it, I found tears running down my face, and I found myself praying.

"O Lord, that I be like that horse under you!"

* * *

No Bridle, No Bit

Think about what a bridle and a bit are for. They exist because a horse, left to itself, will go its own way. The bit gives the rider control. Pull left, and the horse's head goes left, whether the horse wants to go or not.

God spoke about this through David.

Psalm 32:8-9

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

Read that again. "I will counsel you with my eye upon you." And then, "Be not like a horse or a mule... which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you."

God does not want to lead us with a bit in our mouth. He does not want to control us. He never has. Ever since the Garden, he has informed us and let us choose. What he wants is a relationship so close that a glance of his eye is enough. A people who stay near him, not because they are curbed, but because they *want* to be near him.

James uses the same picture.

James 3:3

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

That is how the world leads. Bits and bridles. Control. Pressure. Expectations. Rules enforced from the outside.

And if we are honest, it is often how the sheep holding pen leads too. We put bits in people's mouths: obligations, guilt, the fear of what others will think. We pull on the reins to keep them in, and to keep them going where we think they should go.

But that is not what I saw in that arena. And it is not what Jesus had with his Father.

* * *

Reading the Rider's Mind

When I watched that horse respond to its rider without any visible cue, I immediately thought of John 17.

John 17:20-23

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that *they* also may be in *us*.

That is the unity I saw in the arena. The horse and the rider moving as one. The rider's will expressed through the horse so naturally that you could not tell where one ended and the other began.

The rider, in my mind, is God the Father. The horse is me. And the prayer of my heart is that I would be so united with him, him in me and me in him, that he would hardly have to *do* anything to lead me. That I would sense his will and move with it. *That, as a talmid, I would only say and do what he gives me to say and do, the way Jesus did.*

This is what Jesus said. "I see what the Father is doing and do likewise." No bit. No bridle. Just a Son so one with his Father that he moves when his Father moves.

* * *

Eyes That See, Ears That Hear

How does a horse come to read its rider's mind? And how do we come to sense the will of the Father that way?

God told Isaiah that many people would never get there. And Jesus quoted those same words about the people of his own day.

Matthew 13:14-15

Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have

closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."

Notice what the problem is. It is not the eyes or the ears. It is the heart. Their hearts had grown dull. Also notice that their "minds" are never mentioned. Our problem is that *we decide with our minds* to close our eyes and ears.

And notice the promise hidden inside the warning. If we will see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, and understand with our *heart*, and turn, he will heal us.

That is the path. See. Perceive. Hear. Understand with the heart. Turn (our minds) to him. And be healed.

Then Jesus turned to his talmidim and said,

Matthew 13:16

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall SEE God. When we walk in The Way, our hearts are humble, gentle, merciful and purified of our own agenda. Walking in Jesus' attitudes we begin to SEE what the Father is doing, and to perceive what he wants, the way that horse sensed its rider. Anger, judgment and the need to control cloud our vision such that we *cannot* see God. A heart after the Father's clears it and keeps us from doing the very things we do not want to do (Romans 7:15-19).

* * *

Years of Trust

I am told that a performance like that rider and horse is the fruit of years together. Hours and hours, day after day, of the rider and the horse learning each other. Trust built slowly. The horse learning that the rider is good, that her direction can be trusted, that it is safe to yield.

That is true of us as well.

Hebrews 5:14

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Trained by constant practice. The talmidic life is not a moment. It is a lifetime of walking with him, listening, failing, being restored, and listening again. Over time, his attitudes become *more and more* automatic in us, like brushing our teeth. I have been practicing these things for three or four decades now. I still snap sometimes. But much more rarely than I used to, and I come back to him more quickly.

That is also why Jesus took three years with his talmidim. Not three weeks. Not a weekend seminar. Three years of walking together, so that they could learn his voice and learn to trust it. Then he sent them.

* * *

Fully Alive Under Him

Here is something else I noticed. That horse was not a machine. It was not a robot doing tricks. It was fully a horse, full of power and beauty and life. It was more fully alive in that arena than any horse I have ever seen in a field.

Being led by God does not make us less ourselves. It makes us more fully who he created us to be. He invites us into *creative collaboration* with him. He made each of us unique, and he delights to express his will through the particular person he made.

That is the meekness I saw in the arena. Not weakness. Strength under the direction of a good rider.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

* * *

Why This Matters for a Church With Open Gates

This is one of the reasons why our churches build holding pens. We do not trust that our people can stay near the Shepherd without us. And to

be honest, if we have only ever led them with bits and bridles, we may be right.

But Jesus did not build a pen, and he did not use a bit. He spent three years helping his talmidim become so one with the Father that they could go anywhere he led them *and still be led.* That is what we are called to do as well. Not to control our people, but to help them become like that horse under the Rider.

* * *

O Lord, that I be like that horse under you! I do not want to need a bit and a bridle. Keep your eye upon me, and that your glance be enough. Make me one with you, you in me and me in you, so that I sense your will and move with it. Open my eyes to see and my ears to hear, that I understand with my heart, re-turn and be healed. Lead me. I am yours. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Watch Stacy Westfall's bridleless ride together. What did you notice? What did you feel?
2. Psalm 32 says, "Be not like a horse or a mule... which must be curbed with bit and bridle." Where in your life does God still seem to need a bit and bridle with you?
3. What "bits and bridles" do churches sometimes use to keep people in? What would it look like to lead without them?
4. Jesus says the problem is a heart that has grown dull. What helps your heart see, perceive, hear, understand and turn?
5. Being led by God makes us more fully who he made us to be. Where have you experienced that?

CHAPTER NINE

Orchestrate, Integrate, Unite Your People, O God!

The first three of my additional prayers are personal. Order my steps. BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds. Make me like that horse under you.

But God never intended for his talmidim to be led alone. Jesus sent them out in twos. He prayed that they would be one. And Paul describes the people of God as one body, held together by every joint and ligament.

So this last additional prayer is for all of us together.

Orchestrate, integrate, unite your people, O God,
to more productive service!

* * *

Every Supporting Ligament

Here is the passage this prayer comes from.

> **Ephesians 4:15-16**
> *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Some translations say the body is "joined and held together by every supporting ligament." Paul used the same picture writing to the Colossians.

Colossians 2:19

and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Christ is the Head. Our only authority. The body grows when it holds fast to him, and when each part is working properly, connected to the others.

Think about what a ligament does. It does not do the work of the muscle or the bone. It connects them. It holds the joint together so that the parts can move as one. Without ligaments, the strongest bones in the world just lie there.

That is what so many of our churches are missing. We have wonderful, gifted people. But they are not connected. They sit side by side in rows on Sunday, and many of them have never found their place in the body. In *Leading*, I shared that 45% of the people we need for active service are sitting inactive. Not because they don't care. Because no one has shown them *how to live connected*.

* * *

Orchestrate

When I pray, "Orchestrate your people, O God," I picture an orchestra.

An orchestra has dozens of instruments, each one different. The violin cannot do what the tuba does. The drum cannot play the melody. If every musician played whatever they wanted, as loudly as they wanted, it would be noise. And if the conductor tried to play every instrument himself, it would be a very small and very tired concert.

The conductor does not play. He leads. He keeps every instrument in time, brings each one in at the right moment, and draws out of all of them together something that none of them could make alone.

Romans 12:4-5

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Corinthians 12:18

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

God arranged the members as he chose. He is the Conductor. Our job is not to play every part, or to control how others play theirs. Our job is to watch the Conductor, play our part, and listen to the others.

That is why I pray every morning that God would orchestrate my day and integrate me with those he would have me serve. I am one instrument. He has the whole score.

* * *

Integrate

Then, "Integrate your people."

To integrate is to bring separate parts together into a working whole. It is the work of the ligament.

In *Leading*, I describe how God designed his people to be led by both Directors and Reconcilers, leading together in unity, the way the Father and the Son are one. I describe the four Groups and twelve Teams that every ministry you can imagine will fit within, so that every person has a better chance of finding their connection to satisfying ministry. And I describe three kinds of followers God places in every congregation: Internals, who passionately serve within the church; Externals, whose hearts are for service in the larger community; and Evangelicals, who stand at the ready to share the hope they have, wherever they are.

All of them are needed. None of them is more important than the others. And when we put people of similar passion and differing giftedness together, we will transform our congregations and our communities. Really.

But integration does not happen by announcement. It happens through people. Someone has to notice the quiet man in the back row who spent 30 years as an engineer, and say, "I think Joe's got something here." Someone has to connect the retired nurse with the young mother who

just moved to town. Someone has to see the *leader out of nowhere* that God has sent, and welcome them in rather than feel threatened by them.

That is the work of a church with open gates. Not to hold people in one large room, but to connect them, joint by joint and ligament by ligament, to the people and the places *God* has for them.

* * *

Unite

And then, "Unite your people, O God."

Jesus prayed for this on the night before he died. "That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" (John 17:21). Not one organization. Not one denomination. One the way the Father and Son are one.

We are a long way from that. We have now become more than 250 denominations here in the USA. We divide over politics, over worship styles, over the fine points of our differences. In Jesus' day, the people were divided by the Pharisees and the Sadducees, each claiming to speak for God, each saying, "Follow us, and you will be following God." Look at the Democrats and Republicans of our day. It really is the same thing.

Unity does not come from all of us agreeing on everything. It comes from all of us being led by the same Head. When each of us is praying, "Order my steps, O God," and "BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds," and "Make me like that horse under you," we will find ourselves moving together, because we are following the same Rider.

That is why debates do not unite us. Debates are about winners and losers. Discussion, in the attitudes of Jesus, is about the *collective wisdom* God provides *us*. Iron sharpens iron. But when only one person is allowed to be the iron, relationships fail.

* * *

To More Productive Service

United, integrated and orchestrated for what? For service. For love active in service.

Ephesians 4:11-12

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

The role of the leader is to equip, prepare and facilitate the people for acts of service. Not to control them. Not to direct them to the ministry we need from them. To equip them, and to help them find the good works God prepared beforehand for them.

This is why the Community Service and Support Network (CSASNetwork.org) exists, and why I wrote the "how to" book *Be a Part of the Solution. People will stay with causes that touch their hearts, serving alongside others who share the same passion.* When God orchestrates and integrates his people across all the churches of a town, with the nonprofits and the agencies already serving there, the whole body begins to move. Trust grows. Relationships grow. And the love of God spreads naturally.

* * *

Out Together

Here is why this prayer belongs in a book about sheep pens.

When Jesus sent his talmidim out, he never sent them alone. Two by two. In teams. Connected to each other and accountable to one another, and coming back to report together what God had done.

A church with open gates does not simply turn individuals out into the world to fend for themselves. The people who go out through its gates go out connected. People who know who they can go to for God's wisdom. People who are part of a body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, each part working properly.

The pen holds the sheep together by its walls. The body holds together by its ligaments. One is a container. The other is alive.

* * *

Orchestrate, integrate, and unite your people to more productive service, O God! You are the Conductor; we are your instruments. Arrange each of us in the body as you choose. Connect us, joint by joint and ligament by ligament, to the people and the places you have prepared for us. Make us one, as you and your Son are one, so that the world may know that you sent him. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Who in our congregation is gifted, willing, and not yet connected? What would it take to connect them?
2. If God is the Conductor and you are one instrument, what is your part? Where are you tempted to play someone else's?
3. Are you more of an Internal, an External or an Evangelical? How could our church better support each of those?
4. Where have you seen unity come not from everyone agreeing, but from everyone following the same Head?
5. What would it look like for the churches in our town to be orchestrated and integrated together in service?

Part Four: The Open Gate

What a Sheepfold With Open Gates Can Look Like

CHAPTER TEN

Building Upon a Sure Foundation

So what would it look like for a church to stop trying to keep people in, and instead facilitate their going out in the attitudes of Jesus?

I want to be careful here. There is no single program for this, and I would be the last person to hand you one. Jesus did not run a program. He walked with people. What follows is one way it might look. Take it to your elders, your staff and your twelve or so. Talk about it in the attitudes of Jesus. Ask God together what he would have you do, and adapt it to the people and the places he has given you.

But begin with the end in mind. The end is not a full room. The end is talmidim who are becoming more and more like Jesus, ready to be *more and more* useful to God, moment by moment, wherever he may be leading them.

* * *

Not a Calendar, a Foundation

Jesus' talmidim were ready within about three years. That is why this book says "3 Years and Out!" But please do not hear it as a calendar to lock people into. It is not a three-year program.

It is about building a house upon a sure foundation, as quickly as each person is able.

> **Matthew 7:24-27**
>
> *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the*

sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Hears these words of mine and *does* them. The sure foundation is not what we know *about* Jesus. It is The Way he *lived*, building into us as *we more and more* live it too.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Some will build quickly and surely. Some will take longer. Some will come to us with much of the foundation already laid, and others will need to start from the ground up. That is all right. We are not trying to move people through a schedule. We are trying to help each one build well, upon the Rock, and then to follow the Shepherd out as soon as the house will stand.

Here are the steps and processes, in the order a builder would take them. Some people will move through them in months. Some will take years. And all of us must keep coming back to the foundation for the rest of our lives.

* * *

The Foundation: Being With Him

Remember the order in Mark 3:14. "So that they might be with him and he might send them out." Everything begins with *being* with him.

This is where people learn The Way. Not as information, but as a way of life. The foundation stones might include:

- Learning the four posters: Jesus' Attitudes That Bless, the Fruit of the Spirit, the Manipulate-to-Control Relationship Busters, and True Talmidim Will Evidence. Keeping them on the wall

and on the phone. Reviewing them daily and more deeply on a weekly basis.

- Being part of a small group of twelve or so, walking life-on-life with a few mature talmidim who are further along The Way.
- Learning to pray the four prayers Jesus told us to pray in conversational worship. Consider my daily additional requests of God, and perhaps make them your own. In *conversational worship*, learn to listen as well as speak.
- Taking part in conversational learning on Sundays, where anyone may raise a hand and every question is welcome, and where the collective wisdom of all the people is available to all the people. (Please read *The Once and Future Church* available free as a pdf at OneKingdomWorldwide.org or in print at Amazon.)
- Reading *Life* and *Love* together, and watching the free Lost Essentials video teachings in a small group led by a few mature talmidim. (Everything at OneKingdomWorldwide.org is free.)

The question to ask here is not, "What do you know?" It is, "Who are you *becoming*?"

* * *

The Walls: Walking With Him in Service

Once the foundation is in, the walls can begin to go up. This is where talmidim begin to do what Jesus did, alongside the mature talmidim who are walking with them.

When Jesus sent the twelve and the seventy out, he sent them in twos, with instructions, and he received them back to talk about what happened. This part of the building can look like that.

- Serving in passion-aligned service inside the church, in the community, or wherever God leads.
- Coming back regularly to talk about what happened: where they saw the Father at work, where they struggled, where a Relationship Buster slipped out, where fruit of the Spirit showed up.

- Learning to ask, "Is this mine to do?" and to discern God's leading together.
- Practicing the hard conversations. Learning to inform rather than control, to receive correction and thank the person for it, and to be a peacemaker.
- Reading *Leading*, and beginning to understand how the body is orchestrated and integrated: Directors and Reconcilers, the four Groups and twelve Teams, Internals, Externals and Evangelicals.

The question to ask here is, "Are you learning to see what the Father is doing and are you doing likewise?"

* * *

The Open Door: Going Where He Leads

A house is built to be lived in, and its door opens both ways. In and out. This is where the talmid begins to gather and walk with others, the way *they* were walked with.

- Meeting with at least one other person, and for some, with a few people of their own, with the mature talmidim who walked with them before still walking alongside.
- Discerning, in conversation with God and the mature talmidim they are walking with, where God is leading them. For some, it will be right where they are, raising up the next group. For some, it will be a neighbor or co-worker. For some, it will be a community across town. For some, it will be a nonprofit, a workplace, a neighborhood, or a nation.
- For those who are called to it, taking a job like Paul the tentmaker, so that they can serve without becoming a financial burden on anyone.
- Connecting with the CSASNetwork in their town, so that passion-aligned service can be found and shared across all the churches.

The question to ask here is, "Where is the Father leading you, and who is going with you?"

2 Timothy 2:2

and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

You, to faithful ones, to others also. That is how the twelve became the seventy, and the seventy the five hundred.

* * *

At the Pace God Gives Each One

These are not three classes to pass. They overlap. The foundation keeps getting deeper even as the walls go up and the door swings open. A talmid who is already walking alongside others will still be learning the attitudes of Jesus, still praying the four prayers he told us to pray, still coming back to the posters with a fresh eye.

So how do we know when someone is ready? Not by the calendar. By the fruit. Look again at the fourth poster, True Talmidim Will Evidence. When those things are becoming visible in someone's life, the house is standing. It is time to celebrate, and to agree with God that he give them clarity out in the pasture.

Do not rush the foundation. A house built quickly on sand will fall. But do not delay either. Hebrews 5:12 warns us about people who "by this time ought to be teachers" and are still being fed milk. The goal is a house on the Rock, as quickly as each one is able.

* * *

A Celebration of Open Gates

What if we celebrated these talmidim the way we celebrate a wedding, or a building dedication?

Picture it. On a Sunday, a few people stand at the front. The mature talmidim who walked with them tell the congregation who they have been more and more becoming, and where they sense God is leading them. The elders lay hands on them and pray, the way the church in Antioch did for Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-3). And notice who did

the sending there. "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia" (Acts 13:4). The church did not send them. The Holy Spirit did. The church blessed them, prayed for them, and let them go.

And they are not lost to the church. They *are* the church, out in the pasture with the Shepherd. They come back and report, like the seventy did, and the whole body rejoices together at what God has done.

That is what a sheepfold with open gates looks like. Not a revolving door. An open gate.

* * *

What Happens to the Money?

Today, most of the giving in most churches goes to holding people in: the building, the programs, the staff that run them.

What if our financial gifts were used to draw more and more people in to build upon a sure foundation, and then release them to follow the Shepherd out? What if more of it went to the widows and the orphans, and to the people serving wherever God has led them?

In *Life*, *Leading* and Lost Essentials I suggested that many regions could serve their people with far fewer church buildings than they now maintain, and *use the savings for mission*. I am not telling anyone to sell their building. I am asking every church to look at its budget and ask, "Does this hold people in, or does it help them follow the Shepherd out into the pasture? Are there others that we might merge with?"

* * *

What Happens to the Pastor?

In a holding church, the pastor is often the shepherd of the pen. He preaches, he counsels, he visits, he manages, and he is exhausted. (Pastor, please read *The Once and Future Church* available free as a pdf at OneKingdomWorldwide.org or in print at Amazon.)

In a church with open gates, the pastor becomes one of the mature talmidim walking alongside the people. He walks with his own twelve or so. He equips the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). He is

one of the moderators of the conversation on Sunday rather than delivering a lecture (*The Once and Future Church*!). He celebrates every talmid who goes out making talmidim. And he has a lot more company, because the mature talmidim walking alongside him are now carrying the load with him.

Jesus' yoke is easy, and his burden is light. Ours can be too.

* * *

Measuring What Matters

Finally, a church with open gates measures different things.

Not only how many came, but how many are becoming more and more like Jesus. Not only how many serve, but how many are out making talmidim who are making talmidim. Not only how many we have, but how many we have multiplied in the pasture.

Can you name ten people who are becoming more and more like Jesus this year? How about three? Can you name three who are out making talmidim? If you can, give thanks. If you can't, don't be discouraged. Start with one. Jesus started with twelve.

* * *

> *Lord Jesus, you are the Rock and the sure foundation. Help us build upon you, each one of us, as quickly as you enable us, and not upon the sand. You called your talmidim to be with you, to walk with you, and to go wherever you led them. Make our church a place like that. Show us one step we can take toward it, and give us courage to take it. That our measure be not how many we hold, but how many are out making talmidim. That every one of us who goes out through the gate, go out becoming more and more like you. Amen.*

Questions for Your Twelve

1. What is the sure foundation in your own life? Where might you have built on sand?

2. If our church were built around helping each person build upon the Rock as quickly as they are able, what would we keep doing? What would we stop? What would we start?
3. Which lines on the True Talmidim Will Evidence poster are becoming more and more visible in you? Which are still being built?
4. Who among us are mature enough talmidim that we could start walking together alongside a small group of twelve or so right now? Who is ready to begin?
5. What would a celebration of open gates look like in our church? What one step toward it could we take in the next 90 days?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

For the Sheep Who Feel Stuck

Most of this book has been written to church leaders. This chapter is for everyone else.

Maybe you have been sitting in the same pew for 10, 20 or 30 years. You love your church. You love your pastor. But somewhere deep down, you know you are not much more like Jesus than you were when you started. You have heard thousands of sermons. You know a lot *about* him. And you are hungry for something more.

Maybe you have already left. Maybe you were hurt. Maybe you just drifted away, and you do not know how to come back, or whether you even want to.

Either way, I want you to hear something. God has not given up on you. He never has.

> **Ezekiel 34:11-12**
>
> *"For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.*

He is seeking you out. Right now. Maybe through this book.

* * *

You Don't Need Permission to *Become*

Here is the most important thing I can tell you. You do not need anyone's permission to *become* a talmid.

You do not need a new program. You do not need your church to change first. You do not need to wait for your pastor to read this book.

You can begin today, right where you are, by praying the four prayers Jesus told us to pray (Chapter Five), and the additional prayers that grow out of them.

Order my steps, O God.

BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds.

O Lord, that I be like that horse under you!

Orchestrate, integrate, unite your people, O God, to more productive service!

Put the four posters on your phone. Walk in Jesus' attitudes. Monitor yourself for fruit of the Spirit. Set down every manipulate-to-control strategy. Ask Yahweh, all day long, to lead you. That is The Way. And it is available to you right now.

* * *

Don't Leave in Anger

Some of you, as you read this book, may be tempted to march into your pastor's office and tell him everything that is wrong with your church. Please don't.

Remember the third poster. Judgment, accusation, condemnation and shaming are Relationship Busters, even when we are right. *Especially* when we are right. If you go in angry, you will produce exactly the opposite of what you hope for.

Instead, start with the question: Is it mine to do? Pray about it. Ask God to order your steps. If you sense that he is leading you to talk with your pastor or your elders, go prepared, go respectfully, and go in the attitudes of Jesus. Bring a word of encouragement not just correction, if you have one, and let them weigh it. Elders who are confident that God still speaks will not be afraid of it.

And be patient. About half of the people in any congregation will not change until they see that something works. That is not a flaw. It is how God made many of us. Most pastors are carrying more than you can see. Don't take a posture of superior knowledge. Serve first. Love first. Let them see the fruit.

* * *

Find Your Twelve or So

Jesus did not try to change the whole of Israel at once. He focused on twelve.

You can do the same. Ask God to show you a few people, maybe three, maybe five, maybe twelve, who are hungry like you are. Invite them to read this book with you, or *Gravitas*, or *The Once and Future Church*, or *Life*, or to watch the Lost Essentials video teachings together. Talk about the Questions for Your Twelve at the end of each chapter. Pray together. Serve together.

If you have been walking with Jesus for a while, you may be further along The Way than you think. Someone needs what God has already done in you. You may be the mature talmid someone else has been praying for.

And if you are new to all of this, ask God to send you a mature talmid who is a little further along. He will.

> **Luke 11:9**
>
> *And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

* * *

If You Have Already Left

To those of you who have already left, I want to say this gently. The Good Shepherd did not stop looking for you when you left the building.

You were never meant to follow a building, or a program, or even a pastor. You were made to follow *him*. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

So start there. Listen for *his* voice. Ask him to order your steps. And then ask him who he would have you walk with. You need others. We all do. Iron sharpens iron. The body is joined and held together by every supporting ligament, and you are one of the parts.

Maybe God will lead you back to your old church. Maybe he will lead you to a different one, or to a home community, or to a group of people serving together in your town. Ask him. He will show you.

* * *

Endings Can Be Beginnings

Some of you are in churches that are on their last legs. The building is too big. The budget is too tight. The people are faithful but aging.

Endings can sometimes be wonderful beginnings. Maybe the twelve or so who remain are exactly the ones God has purposefully given you. Maybe this is the moment to stop maintaining a pen and start enjoying the company of talmidim who want to make talmidim who will make talmidim.

If that is your situation, please contact me. I mean that.

* * *

> *Good Shepherd, thank you for seeking me out. I am hungry to become more and more like you, not just to know more and more about you. Order my steps. Show me who to walk with, and who you would have me walk alongside. Keep me from anger and judgment, that I have a pure heart such that I can SEE what you are doing and creatively collaborate in participation with you in it. Thank you for the patience and self-control you will give me to persevere in being good and kind. Lead me out to good pasture, and bring others with me. Amen.*

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Do you feel stuck? If so, how long have you felt that way, and what do you think is missing?
2. What would it look like for you to begin the talmidic life today, without waiting for anything to change around you?
3. Is there a conversation you need to have with a pastor or elder? How can you prepare for it in the attitudes of Jesus?

4. Who are three to twelve people you could invite to read and discuss this book with you?
5. Who might God be sending you to walk alongside, because of what he has already done in you?

CHAPTER TWELVE

Go!

Jesus' last words to his talmidim were not, "Stay." They were, "Go."

> **Matthew 28:19-20**
>
> *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

He did not say, "Build a building and tell them to come." He did not say, "Go to church." He said go, and make *talmidim*: people who are becoming more and more like him, who go like he went.

And notice the promise at the end. "I am with you always." He was not sending them away from himself. He was going with them. That is why they could go without bridle or bit, without a pen to hold and protect them. The Rider was *with* them.

* * *

Those Who Were Scattered

In the first chapters of Acts, the church in Jerusalem grew to thousands. And for a while, it seems, they stayed right there. Then persecution came, and scattered them.

> **Acts 8:4**
>
> *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*

God used even that. The sheep that had gathered in Jerusalem were scattered, not like the sheep of Ezekiel 34, with none to seek them, but as people led by the Shepherd, carrying him with them. And everywhere they went, new communities of talmidim sprang up.

We do not have to wait for persecution to scatter us, though it is truly happening everywhere. We can simply follow the Shepherd out, wherever he leads.

* * *

The Twelve, the Seventy, the Five Hundred

Let me remind you one more time of how it happened.

Jesus invested deeply in twelve. Within about three years, they were ready to be sent. The twelve multiplied into the seventy. The seventy into the five hundred. Then three thousand were awakened at Pentecost and went home to their nations. And within a generation, The Way had spread across the known world.

No sheep pens. No bits and bridles. Just ordinary people who had been with Jesus, who had learned to see what the Father was doing and do likewise, and who followed him wherever he led.

That can happen again. It is happening, in small ways, in places all over the world. The soil is being prepared. These are exciting days.

> **Isaiah 43:19**
>
> *Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

* * *

Under the Rider

I'll be in my 70s soon. Time seems to go by faster every year. I thank God for that. I'll be home before I know it.

And more and more, the prayer of my heart is the one I prayed with tears that day watching the horse and its rider. O Lord, that I be like that horse under you! That I would be so one with you that you hardly have to do anything to lead me. That I would only say and do what you give me to say and do. That my whole life would be one long, beautiful ride with you.

I am not there yet. But I am more there than I used to be. Little by little, success by success, glory by glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). And that is enough. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

* * *

Your Next Step

Dear reader, you have reached the end of this short book. Here is what I would ask of you.

Don't put it on a shelf. Gather your elders, your staff, your small group, or the handful of people God has already put around you. Talk about it. Disagree with me where you need to, in the attitudes of Jesus. Ask God together what he would have you do, and listen together for his answer.

Then take one step. Just one. Maybe it is praying the four prayers Jesus told us to pray, and the additional prayers of Part Three, every morning for 30 days. Maybe it is putting the four posters on the wall. Maybe it is calling your twelve or so. Maybe it is asking your elders, "What would it look like for our people to be out making talmidim within three years or so?"

Everything at OneKingdomWorldwide.org is free: all of the books, the 45 free small-group-friendly video teachings, and all of the posters. Use them. Share them. They were made for you. Appendix B lists some.

And if I can help, let me know. I'll go anywhere for free if people will cover my expenses.

No more sheep holding pens. Three years and out. Go!

* * *

> *Yahweh, thank you that you are with us always, to the end of the age. Send us. Order our steps. BE our thoughts, our needs, our words and our deeds. Make us like that horse under you. Orchestrate, integrate and unite your people to more productive service, with every supporting ligament, from the twelve to the seventy to the five hundred. Lead your sheep out to good pasture. Your*

kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. That none should perish. Amen.

Questions for Your Twelve

1. Jesus said, "Go." Where is he sending you?
2. What does it mean to you that he said, "I am with you always" in the same breath as "Go"?
3. Where do you perceive God "doing a new thing" in our community right now?
4. Of the additional prayers in Part Three, which one do you most need to pray this month?
5. What one step will you take in the next 30 days? Who will you take it with?

Appendix A: The Four Posters

These four posters belong together, on the wall wherever conversational learning happens: in your Sunday gathering, your leadership meetings, your small groups and your homes. The first three guide how we speak to one another. The fourth helps us monitor our growth in *becoming* more and more like Jesus. All four are formatted for printing and are available free for viewing and download at OneKingdomWorldwide.org. Keep all four on your phone as well, so you can review them daily or weekly wherever you are. Like a familiar passage of Scripture, they will keep showing you something new.

1. Jesus' Attitudes: Attitudes That Bless (Matthew 5:2-12)

- Be poor in spirit. Be humble. Don't think so much about yourself.
- When you mourn, be comforted by the big picture: why you are here, that life is short, and that eternity with God awaits.
- Be meek. Gentleness as a way of life.
- Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Pray as Jesus taught us: give us justice against our adversaries, O God, and send your laborers to them that they repent and come into right relationship with you.
- Be merciful, and receive mercy.
- Be pure in heart. Overcome the temptations of anger, and SEE God. See, perceive, hear, and understand with your heart – that we be healed.
- Be a peacemaker, child of God.
- When you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, rejoice and be glad. Jesus said, "Take heart; I have overcome the world." Eternity awaits.

2. The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness and Perseverance, Gentleness, Self-Control

Monitor yourself for fruit of the Spirit results, in language and in actions.

3. Manipulate-to-Control Relationship Busters

Judgment, Anger, Accusation, Condemnation, Shaming, Demanding, Ultimatums, Intimidation, Threatening, Coercion, Retaliation, Abuse of Power, Going Silent, Pride, Give to Get, Lies, Deception, Self-Focus, Rigid Expectations, Rationalization, Rejection, Trickery, Covetousness, and things like these.

What are your eyes, face, body language, volume and tone saying? Are you trying to threaten and intimidate, or nurture and facilitate?

4. True Talmidim Will Evidence

- Dominion over the earth, but not over people. (Genesis 1:26-30; 1 Samuel 8:4-22; Mark 10:42-45)
- The Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:3-17)
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, your neighbor as yourself, and one another as I have loved you. (Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34-35)
- Love active in service. (John 12:26; Mark 9:35; Mark 10:45; Galatians 5:13)
- Hearts after the Father in attitudes consistent with the Beatitudes: Jesus' attitudes. (Matthew 5:2-12)
- Fruit of the Spirit language and actions. (Galatians 5:22-24)
- The unity, character and attributes of John 17.
- Knowing God's voice and following him. (John 10:27)
- Creative collaboration and participation in accomplishing the will of the Father. (Genesis 2:19-20; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Mark 6:34-44)

- Only saying and doing what the Father gives them to say and do. (John 5:19; John 12:49-50; John 14:10)
- The elimination of anger, judgment, condemnation, hierarchy and manipulate-to-control behaviors from their lives. (Romans 1:28-32; Colossians 3:1-17; Galatians 5:13-26)
- The overcoming of the temptations and desires of the flesh, their sacrifice nothing compared to Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. (Colossians 3:1-17; Ephesians 5:1-21; 1 John 2:3-6)
- Becoming mature and effective laborers more and more: the twelve, the seventy and the five hundred.

Appendix B: The Six Steps

The books and tools of One Kingdom Worldwide form a step-by-step, comprehensive system. Each builds on the one before it. All are free.

- **Step One: The Once and Future Church.** Returning the Church to the Way Jesus Left It. Recovering the conversational, relational, talmidic church Jesus left behind for us. Start here.
- **Step Two: Gravitas.** Reimagining the Sunday Lecture Model, Restoring Jesus' Conversational Model. A short, direct summary for church leaders of why the change matters.
- **Step Three: Life.** Living the Good Life God Offers Us, Revealing the Deception as Old as Time Itself. The main teaching book, wonderful for discipleship, helping people find their way out of manipulate-to-control behaviors and toward Jesus' attitudes.
- **Step Four: Love.** Contemplations on the Prayers Jesus Taught Us. A sanctification book, between God and the individual reader, for the interior life of conversational worship.
- **Step Five: Leading.** Uniting God's People to *More* Productive Service. The collective wisdom of the elders: co-leadership, the Unity Operating System, and the four Groups and twelve Teams.
- **Step Six: Community Transformation.** The Community Service and Support Network at CSASNetwork.org, helping individuals and congregations find passion-aligned places to serve, so that trust, relationship and the love of God can spread naturally. *Be a Part of the Solution*, How to Start a Community Service and Support Network in Your Town or City, shows how.

Also Free at OneKingdomWorldwide.org

- Lost Essentials: Essential Scriptural Context That Has Been Lost Down Through the Ages. Short, small-group-friendly video teachings that walk through the *Life* book with portions of *Gravitas* woven in.
- The Making of Talmidim in Jesus' Day, a four-video series. Discipleship in Jesus' day isn't what it has become for us. Take a look back at how Jesus made talmidim (what we errantly call disciples): people in the process of becoming more and more like who their Rabbi Jesus is.
- Why We Are Closing 16 Churches Every Day in the USA, a video teaching. Europe is why we preach on Sundays. This teaching shows how we became stuck in Europe's failed Sunday lecture model, and calls us back to Jesus' conversational Hebrew Sabbath tradition.
- How and Why to Start Conversational Learning on Sundays, a video teaching for church leaders.
- What Is a Talmid?, a short introduction on the website.
- All of the posters and charts in this book and in *Life*, *Love* and *Leading*.

If you have questions, concerns or would like help, please contact One Kingdom Worldwide at OneKingdomWorldwide.org. Everything is free. You'll be glad you did.

To receive additional free copies please contact:
One Kingdom Worldwide
One@OneKingdomWorldwide.org

PDF files of this book may be legally shared.

All of the charts and posters in the Life, Love and Leading books are available for free download at

About the author:

Ricky Kroeger has spent more than 40 years consulting with organizations in 20 countries across five continents. He has also been a pastor, an executive pastor, an elder and has participated in two church plants. He is the author of:

The Once and Future Church

Returning the Church to the Way Jesus Left It

Gravitas

Reimagining the Sunday Lecture Model
Restoring Jesus' Conversational Model

Life

Living The Good Life God Offers Us
(Revealing The Deception As Old As Time Itself)

Love

"Lord, teach us how to pray."
Contemplations on the Prayers Jesus Taught Us

Leading

Uniting God's People to More Productive Service

Be a Part of the Solution

How to Start a Community Service and Support Network in Your Town or City

No More Sheep Holding Pens

3 Years and Out!

Satan Away

Your Self, My Self or Our Selves