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The Everyday Disciple: Following Jesus One Step at a Time Sermon 2

Luke 6:12-26, 46-49

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¹² In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. ¹⁷ And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. ²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. ²² "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵ "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. ²⁶ "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. ⁴⁶ "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6:12-26, 46-49, ESV)

This fall we are asking the question, *what are the marks of a disciple? What does it mean to be more than a cultural Christian, but to be an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ?*

Last week we saw that discipleship begins with the Gospel. A disciple is *gospel*ed: got and changed by the grace of God. This grace—God's unmerited kindness towards us in Jesus—is not only the tarmac from which we take off into discipleship. This grace is the plane that upholds and carries us each step of the way.

Today we'll see that grace does not make us complacent. Jesus sought and found Peter, His first disciple, out in Peter's fishing boat. But Jesus does not leave him there. That encounter concludes with Peter and his friends on the move: "And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed [Jesus]" (Luke 5:11).

The second mark of a disciple is following, and following requires hearing and harkening to the voice of Jesus.

In this sermon, we will be considering which voice, or voices, we're following: *Who speaks loudest in your life? How much authority do the words of others have in shaping and guiding you? What does it look like, biblically and practically, to follow Jesus by hearing and harkening to His voice?*

The connection between discipleship and hearing Jesus' voice is made clear by Jesus' first move after choosing His twelve disciples in Luke 6. After a night of prayer, Jesus picks His Twelve disciples (Luke 6:13-16). They are called "apostles" here (6:13), signaling their unique role not only as followers but as those who will be sent as messengers in the early church. After choosing them, Jesus comes down from the mountain and in vs. 20, "lifted up his eyes on his disciples" and began to teach them.

The sermon unfolds from vv .20-49, and is very similar to that other famous sermon in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount. It's likely this sermon represents topics Jesus taught on often. They unfold the character and ways of the Kingdom of God. Themes and verses may be familiar:

- "Blessed are the poor (in Spirit)" (Luke 6:20; Matthew 5:3)
- "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies" (Luke 6:27; Matthew 5:44)
- "Judge not, and you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37; Matthew 7:1-5)
- "No good tree bears bad fruit" (Luke 6:43; Matthew 7:16)

I want to draw our attention to how Jesus closes the sermon. It concludes with what feels like a warning, a warning that underscores the importance of hearing Jesus' words, and offers some guidance as to how we might do so:

Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been

well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:46-49)

A house quickly collapsing in a flash flood was a familiar scene for those living in the arid countryside of Israel. Both Israel and London receive about 22 inches of rain a year. But while London has 300 rainy days, Jerusalem has only 50. This high intensity of rainfall, combined with a rocky and dry landscape, causes runoffs and flash floods.¹ A house built on sandy soil would find the floodwaters rushing beneath its structure, eroding its very foundation, leading to sudden collapse. On the other hand, a house built on a foundation of stone could withstand any number of torrents.

Jesus is making a stern point to any who would be His disciple: *unless my words fill and form your life, you will collapse when challenges come. However, if you take my word into you, hearing and doing it, you will be strong as a rock.*

I. Hearing Is Hard

Jesus' emphasis on hearing

Jesus' emphasis on listening to His words rings across the Gospels: "He called the people to him again and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand'" (Mark 7.14); And, most emphatically: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31). One might even say Jesus' life and ministry are one great argument to listen to Him.

Why the emphasis? It's not only that Jesus' Words "give life" (John 6:68) and awaken faith (Romans 10:17).² Jesus' emphasis on hearing also has something to do with a universal human problem: we are bad at listening. Hearing and understanding are no simple matter.

In a haunting scene, Jesus is interacting with the religious professionals of His day; these are men steeped in the words of the Scriptures. But these men seem unable to understand Jesus and react to His words with hate instead of love. And at one point, in John 8, Jesus says to these Pharisees: "³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you" (John 8:36-37).

There was "no place" for Jesus' word inside the Pharisees.

Our challenges to hearing

Might this be the case for us? Could we have “no place” for Jesus’ word in us—unable to truly hear and deeply understand His Words? Before we consider how we hear Jesus, we would be wise to consider at least two things that may get in the way: the noise around and the sickness within.

We live in a world awash with words. And this makes hearing difficult. Thinkers from journalists to neuroscientists worry our digital age negatively affects how we take in information and reduces our ability for deep understanding. In his book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr speaks of his own experience: When trying to read anything substantial, he explains,

I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle ... Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words, now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.³

More recently, Maryanne Wolf, scholar and teacher in the area of developmental psychology, wrote *Reader Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*. In it she tries an experiment; she goes back to a favorite novel from her past and tries to read it again. But she can't. She cannot concentrate well enough to engage a complex and long novel.⁴ She concludes that at some point in the past fifteen years or so, “she began to read more to be informed than to be immersed, much less to be transported.” She concludes she'd “changed in ways I would never have predicted. I now read on the surface and very quickly; in fact, I read too fast to comprehend deeper levels.” She had lost the “cognitive patience” that once sustained her in reading such books. She blamed the internet.⁵

There are many blessings that this digital age brings. Access to unprecedented amounts of information is one. However, at the same time, this deluge of information has a negative effect: it diminishes our ability to think critically and cultivate wisdom. We are like the wannabe handyman who has a garage full of new tools but can't work any of them. Our lives are glutted with news and information, but we increasingly lack the skills of reasoning, discernment, and wisdom. The constant noise around us affects our ability to hear the still and soft voice of the Lord.

The sickness inside

Along with noise all around, Jesus sees another problem getting in the way of hearing Him, and this has to do with our hearts. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus says of one audience:

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... (Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:14-15).

How does your heart affect your head? The Bible teaches that what we love, and fear, and hate, shapes what we are able to understand. A woman's love for her country may limit her ability to listen to fair criticism about it. A man's fear of appearing wrong may diminish his ability to engage an argument. And hatred of anyone makes it nearly impossible truly to hear a positive word about them.

What our hearts are most deeply moved by impacts our ability to truly hear. You see this often with the disciples themselves. They are so very eager that Israel will be vindicated before her enemies and stand once again as a great Kingdom. But this passion makes it very hard for them to hear and understand Jesus' teaching to "love our enemies," or that "the first shall be last," or that His way is the way of the cross. Their hearts are so committed to a way of seeing things, that it clogs their ears.

Bombarded by noise without, and often callous or idolatrous within, we all can risk being people to whom Jesus says: "my word finds no place in you" (John 8:37). But this need not be the case. Turning again to how Jesus concludes this sermon, we notice three keys to hearing the voice of our Good Shepherd.

II. How a Disciple Hears Jesus' Words

1. Listen reverentially

The first way to listen is to come reverentially. In verses 46-47 Jesus shows that there is a connection between true respect for Him and how well we can hear Him: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you?" The title "Lord, Lord" conveys great respect and an awareness of Jesus' authority. Here, Jesus implies that if this were true of someone, they would take in His word not superficially, but so that it changes them.

Our culture does not create reverence towards the words of others. Instead, we increasingly listen with cynicism, skepticism, and casual indifference. But we cannot hear Jesus if we approach Him this way. There is a place for wrestling with the Bible—asking questions about sources and history and translations. And these questions are answerable. But for the disciple, a point comes when we are not coming to Jesus to argue; we are coming in humility and reverence because He is the Lord.

I had a friend in college who used to wear a suit whenever he took an exam. I asked him why. He said because it helped him take things more seriously; it helped him focus. Carve out a space to listen to Jesus that conveys reverence. And this goes for reading the entire Bible: Jesus says, “The word that you hear is not mine, but the Father’s who sent me” (John 14:24). In other words, the same Father who was speaking through the Old Testament scriptures, speaks through Jesus. If we approach our Lord’s Word with reverence, it will open our ears to hear Him.

2. Listen personally

The second way to listen is personally. We are not reading a science or history textbook when we read the Gospels; we are hearing from a person. Notice the personal aspect of Jesus’ words in verse 47: “Everyone who comes to me, and hears my words....” (6:47).

Engaging with the Word of God is not merely or even primarily engaging with rote words. Jesus stands behind His words, and by His Spirit, He speaks afresh through them. Saint Paul will later explain that “All scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The connection between Scripture and breath is important. Just as our breath carries our words out of our mouths towards a listener, so too the Holy Spirit (the breath of God, Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4) moves within the Word of God, making it living and active (Hebrews 4:12), making it personal. Human beings are unique in their capacity and need for communication. We use language and words with sophistication unlike any other creature. This is partly how we bear the image of God—a God who speaks.

Hardwired into the soul of every human being is a need to hear good words. We need to hear a powerful and trustworthy voice say things about us that build us up. Words do more than just guide and instruct; words kill and give life.⁶ A cruel word spoken at a vulnerable time can create a crack in the very foundation of a life: “*you’re stupid.*” “*I never loved you.*” Words are powerful. And we all need to hear the Words from a personal God who personally knows us and loves us. When you hunch over your Bible, early in the morning, and in the dim light read these words from Jesus: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (John 15:9), you are meant to hear it as the Son of God personally addressing you... because He is.

One way to increase the personal aspect of hearing Jesus’ Words, is to pray. Pray before you read your Bible. Pray while you read your Bible. Take a specific verse and pray it back to God: “*You love*

your Son so much. And He says to me, that He loves me this way. Oh God, this is amazing. Let my heart feel it. Thank you."

3. Listen actively

Thirdly and finally, Jesus offers us a piercing insight: if you want to hear His words, then *do them*.

Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock (Luke 6:47-48).

This is the decisive difference-maker. Whether or not someone merely hears, or actually acts, reveals whether they truly see Jesus as Lord and whether they will truly taste that His Word is true and good. The relationship between hearing the Word of God and acting upon it is crucial and often emphasized:

- Jesus said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21)
- "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)
- "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22)

Jesus expects us to obey Him by putting into practice what He teaches us. Not only does such "doing" show the authenticity of our relationship to Jesus. It also authenticates Jesus' words to our hearts. The old maxim proves true: proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is often in engaging Jesus' words actively that our hearts come to taste how true and good His words are. I want to dig in a bit here. Sometimes we can experience a dry spell in our time in the Word. I want to suggest some practical ways to relate to Jesus more deeply in His Word, by moving from hearing to doing. I'll take two things Jesus says, and consider how to move from hearing to doing:

Love your enemies

During this sermon He's just given, Jesus instructs His disciples about a radical type of love. He says, "I say to you who hear, Love your enemies" (6:27). There are cases and times, of course, when we have been hurt so badly that all we can do with our enemies is to give them to God—to engage in any real sense would be too unsafe. However, in a general sense, Jesus is teaching us here a deep

principle: rather than harboring hate and nursing resentment, love those people who you feel you have a good reason not to like.

How can you go from hearing this to doing it?

This week, get something to write on: a journal, sticky note, index card. Right the name of the person who your heart desires—even enjoys—to hate on the card. Then write a prayer for them. What should you pray for them? Ask God to do for them something that you are asking God to do for you. For example:

Dear Lord, please protect the children of _____ fill in the blank. Or, Lord, please bless their marriage. Or, Lord, please give them good health.

You say, *but I cannot do this*. Jesus anticipates this objection and points out that He is asking us to be like His Father: “³⁵ But love your enemies ... and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36). Do this every day this week. And see if your heart doesn’t begin to taste and see that the words of Jesus’ give life.

Give thanks

Earlier in the sermon, Jesus says that the truly blessed are those who may seem less fortunate now. They are poor and hungry, either physically or spiritually, or both. He even says the blessed of God may be mistreated by others. But then in verse 23, he says, “Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven” (Luke 6:23).

The Bible is relentless in this directive: humans are to be rejoicing, giving thanks, grateful—in any circumstances. And we are to be this, towards God. Here’s another example: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).⁷

Have you ever truly labored not only to hear but to do this instruction? Here is how you can this week:

Again, get something to write on (you should get a journal for prayer time, or use your sermon guidebook). Each morning this week, take ten to fifteen minutes to write out ten things you are grateful for, and why you are grateful for them. For example, you might write,

“For my mom, who every day makes sure I have food, a ride to school, and clean clothes.”

“For my health, today I can exercise which makes me feel better.”

“For my bed, which allows me to get a good night’s sleep.”

“For my friend (be specific), who picks up when I call so I don’t feel alone.”

Write ten things. Then pause, turn to prayer, and thank God for these blessings. For as James says, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights....” (James 1:17). Do this every morning this week and see if your heart does not begin to grow warm. See if you suddenly don’t start to feel closer to the Person behind the words you read in the Bible—the living and breathing Son of God.

Marilynne Robinson is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and professor of at the distinguished University of Iowa’s Writers’ Workshop. Both her fiction and non-fiction are grounded in her deepest convictions, which are theological and Christian. I am often curious about the personal lives of people like Marilynne—especially their reading habits. I read eagerly an interview done with her a few years back in the privacy of her modest Iowa City living room. One image struck me with particular force.

As her interviewer glanced over Marilynne’s shoulder, he describes a long table hugging the wall. On it rested the 20 volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary and facing down the O.E.D. was a bookcase jammed with more than a dozen Bibles: two versions of the GK Old Testament, Jerome’s Latin translation, and no less than three editions of Tyndale’s early English translation. Here, in the heart of her home, was a sign of her devotion to the Word of God.

May our lives look like this. May they not be over-stuffed with newsfeeds and text messages but resounding with the clarity and power of the voice of our Good Shepherd: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples” (John 8:31).

Endnotes

1. Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, (Eerdmans: 2018) pg. 333.
2. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).
3. For Carr's work, see, Nicolas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *The Atlantic*, 2008; *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2011).
4. Read a review of her book here: <https://slate.com/culture/2018/08/reader-come-home-by-maryanne-wolf-reviewed.html>
5. Ibid.
6. E.g., "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Prov 18:21).
7. Other examples of calls to give thanks: "Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:1-4); "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil 4:6-7).; "And the Levites were to stand every morning, thanking and praising God" (1 Chron. 23:30).