



The Jesus Touch

Companion Articles to the Study

by

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*With gratitude to the readers
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About Anna

Since Anna is one of the first encounters with Jesus as an infant recorded, that's where we'll begin.

"There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:36-38).

Anna could be described as a pious, elderly widow. Faithful. Disciplined. Devoted. A "seasoned saint."

While the record is brief, there is much we can learn about her from the passage. And there is much we can learn from her. We can learn about faithfulness, about looking forward, and about prayer. And about sharing Jesus—because after she laid eyes on Jesus, she "spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to redemption."

What else about Anna?

Faith prepared her to see Jesus when He came.

Don't we need an active faith like that?

But notice how long she waited!

We've all known times of waiting. Waiting for improved health, improved finances, improved relationships. Waiting for a phone call, a notification, a reply email. We never know the span of the waiting season. But we know God can be trusted as we wait before Him.

What do you do when you wait? Do you stay busy . . . worry . . . pray?

In her waiting, Anna hoped and prayed.

How she must have trusted God! He obviously was faithful to renew her strength to endure her circumstances and the oppression of Rome and the religious authorities.

Anna remained at the Temple—devoted to God in prayer. She was familiar with what Scripture foretold. So, she lived her life around what her faith knew to believe.

Anna never lost hope that she would see the Messiah.

Someday we, too, will see our Savior.

Do we live like that?

Are we like Anna: watching . . . waiting . . . READY?!

The Touch of Jesus for Anna

I hope you are discovering the riches to be learned from Anna. Now, let's consider how Jesus touched her.

The text tells us she spent her days in the Temple—in worship and prayer (Lk 2:36-38).

Day after day. Year after year. Decade after decade. Until one day—much like all the others—she saw Baby Jesus!

All those years, however, God saw her . . . heard her.

Here, at last, was the answer to her many prayers!

Anna experienced a spiritual touch. She was graciously rewarded for her faithful devotion. And she witnessed a promise of God fulfilled!

Simeon knew it—he also recognized their salvation was at hand (Lk 2:29-32).

But to realize that her prayers had been answered, she had to be watching. In her years of waiting and praying and hoping, she also had to be watching—in order to see what she was waiting for when it finally came.

Because of the choices Anna made, and the way she lived her life, she was prepared for the arrival of Jesus.

There are Annas all around us. You have likely seen them in the pews of your church. Those “seasoned saints.” God knows each one. And He wants to use you to touch them. He wants you to be the touch of Jesus.

Take time to notice them. Then, reach out and touch them with encouragement for their faithful waiting.

By sharing Jesus' touch, we can help keep hope alive in each other—that we may remain faithfully devoted as Anna.

A Touch for the Wondering

“For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.

“And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk 1:15, 17).

John was full of fire and the Spirit.

He boldly proclaimed the Word of God and turned the hearts of men to obedience and righteousness.

But hardened hearts turned against him.

“But when [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

‘I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire’” (Mt 3:7-8; 11-12).

John was faithful to his calling. He preached a powerful message of repentance and baptism. And he never backed down from speaking truth to the religious authorities. I have no doubt that his warnings of judgment ruffled more than a few feathers (as it typically does).

“But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done,” Herod locked John up in prison (Lk 3:19-20).

John faithfully “prepared the way of the Lord” as foretold...until he collided with the wicked king.

When John bravely confronted his sin, Herod Antipas had him imprisoned—persecuted for his faith.

Isn’t that how the world often responds when it feels offended...threatened...exposed?

John went to prison for living out the conviction of his faith. Persecuted, for what he believed.

He was treated unjustly for speaking truth in the face of sin.

Sound familiar?

We don't know the details of his imprisonment. But we do know of a time when, in his duress, he sent an SOS to Jesus.

"When the men came to Jesus, they said, 'John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (Lk 7:20)

When things don't go as expected—especially when doing the will of God and someone suffers for it—it's easy to question. Sometimes overwhelming thoughts crowd out all we know of the Christ of God. Things of faith are forgotten.

John desperately needed a reminder.

He wasn't the first—and hardly the last—to ask if Jesus is the Messiah. After all, Jesus didn't exactly fit the mold of what they expected of the coming King.

People are still asking. Wondering. Doubting.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who do not stumble on account of Me" (Mt 11:6).

Many have stumbled on Jesus.

Stumble still.

Touched through the Flames

From his prison cell, John sought reassurance from the Lord.

Have you ever been in a situation when you did what you knew to be right, but were treated unjustly for it? When none of the outcomes made sense? When you took a stand for what you believed about Jesus, then took some heat for it, and later questioned whether you were right in doing so?

Have you known a time when what you **felt** overtook what your faith **knew**?

John looked to Jesus for reassurance in his wondering. Jesus responded gently to His suffering servant. When John most needed it, Jesus provided a reassuring word. And He honored John's request by sending back a reaffirming reminder.

Jesus answered John with Scripture. As prophet and preacher paving the way and pointing to the Christ, John would recognize the signs of the Messiah. He would **know** the promises of God, regardless of what he **felt** in such adversity. So, Jesus gave him evidence of His identity by telling John of the deeds He was performing—deeds only the promised Messiah would do.

John lived differently from those around him. He lived a set-apart life...he lived what he preached. And he went out into the wilderness to prepare the way for others to know Jesus.

While serving the Lord, he was imprisoned for his message and ultimately lost his life. But when he reached a low point—being persecuted for his faith—Jesus touched him with an encouraging word.

So can we!

We can support and encourage the Lord's missionaries. We can earnestly and persistently pray for the persecuted Church. And we can offer blessed assurance to those being persecuted for their faith.

These are dark times for multitudes around the globe—times in which Christians are being unjustly imprisoned and tortured. Jesus said it would be so. But He told His disciples not to fear "those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt 10:28).

I commend John's courage, for living what he believed and for proclaiming the Kingdom of God and righteousness. It is ours to do likewise. And to reassure those who are suffering for doing the same. As long as it is day, we must encourage one another to faith-fully endure. And we can do so by offering our Lord's reassuring words-of-promise about Who He is and what He has done.

Dare to share the touch of Jesus.

When you naturally want to go one way, but Jesus wants you to go another....

Think about all the different personality types it takes to run an organization. You've got to admit that some personalities fit some positions better than others. What about in the church? The Apostles certainly had a variety of personalities! Different personality types are better suited for certain ministries and audiences.

This week we'll learn from Philip about how God uses our personalities.

Long before Philip was a disciple, an apostle, or an evangelist, he was a fisherman from Bethsaida, the same village as Peter and Andrew. In fact, it is quite likely they all attended the same synagogue together.

Philip was in the wilderness following John the Baptist with his lifetime friends, Peter, Andrew, and Nathanael, when Jesus sought him out. In fact—consider this carefully—he was the first one sought out by Jesus.

Philip's response to the simple "Follow Me" from Jesus (Jn 1:45) was eager excitement. He **ran** to tell his close friend Nathanael, "We have found him," which implies two things:

1. He believed what the Scriptures taught him
2. He was seeking the Messiah

That response could not have been perfected—even with great planning. But when you combine the collective passages which include Philip, bits of his personality emerges. (We actually read more about Philip in the Gospel of John than in any other New Testament book.) Philip seemed to be a facts and figures kind of guy. He was practically minded, pessimistic, mathematical, and sometimes cynical.

In his book, "12 Ordinary Men," John MacArthur writes: "He was the type that would be more obsessed to find reasons why something **can't** be done rather than finding ways **to do** them."

His personality really shows through in John 6, with the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus purposefully posed a question specifically to Philip in order to test him. A much needed test to help his faith triumph personality.

Overwhelmed with the impossible, his first natural instinct was to calculate that it couldn't be done. He looked at the crowd and saw numbers. He responded instinctively, making a financial assessment. In all his figuring, however, he didn't factor in the ability of Jesus to be the Answer.

A more revealing account of Philip occurs in the Upper Room, during the last Passover meal Jesus celebrated with His disciples. He seemed comfortable in posing his question to Jesus, "Lord show us the Father" (Jn 14:8). (A question asked by multitudes down through the ages!) Thankfully, he asked it for all of us. If he had not, we wouldn't have the quintessential answer! Recorded for all mankind is this treasured jewel-of-a-response from Jesus. One that makes several things perfectly clear.

Philip wanted to see the Father. His personality demanded it. So Jesus, in His patient grace, went there with him and responded, in essence: "If you can't believe I and the Father are one **[what you can't see]**, believe the miracles **[what you can see]**" (Jn 14:11). Jesus factored in Philip's personality and led him the way to faith's path. He taught him how to navigate his natural tendency of going one way, when he needed to be going in quite another.

Did Philip's questions stem from a weak faith...or possibly from his personality type?

The world is full of "Philips"—unsure, logical, skeptical, demanding proof. The good news is: it hardly negates the ability to believe. Or our usefulness to God. Jesus meets us right where we are...and draws near with a needed touch.

Putting Personalities to Proper Use

Philip had a demeanor all his own. As did all the Apostles. And every disciple who has since followed.

Over the ages, studies have developed resourceful methods to help identify various personality types. This is helpful—especially in recognizing areas in which you're most useful.

Jesus helped Philip navigate his personality to faith and to fulfill his calling. He saw his personality and taught Philip how to use it to carry out His mission, to the glory of God.

Jesus saw Philip's usefulness. He chose him and touched him with patience, with teaching, and with testing. Philip was greatly used in spreading the gospel and as one of the founding fathers of the church. Philip was one of the first apostles to suffer martyrdom.

There is more said of Philip after the Ascension. Church history teaches "multitudes came to Christ under his preaching." The disciple-turned-evangelist was more effective after Pentecost, **after** receiving the Holy Spirit, Who empowered his personality for effective usefulness.

From the blunders in the Upper Room, to final results—when all was said and done, Philip was used by God to further the kingdom of Christ.

From Philip we can learn, that beyond skills, abilities, and experience, someone's personality should be considered in matters of ministry. **It takes all kinds to build a church.** Variety in personality types is its success, not its downfall.

Being knowledgeable of the types of personalities, and understanding their traits, helps us to use them to their fullest potential. Not only to see what fits, but what doesn't.

Often we allow our differences to separate us, instead of celebrating our differences and seeing how they work together to accomplish a common goal. In recognizing the variety, we quickly realize that each type would be missed if they weren't part of the Body.

Regardless of personality, we were all created by God...and we can all be used by God. He is able to work through **each** of us—using our strengths and helping us in our weakness—to accomplish His set purpose.

Sharing the touch Jesus had for Philip is to **see in others their usefulness to God in the Kingdom of Christ.** It is to gently help them to see it for themselves. And then encourage them to put it to use.

The touch that gives great hope to us all

Matthew's tax booth in Capernaum was on a commercial, international trade route. It may not have been the most esteemed trade, but it sure was lucrative. Lonely...but lucrative.

Tax collectors were "more worthy of scorn than the occupying Roman soldiers," writes John MacArthur in his book *Twelve Ordinary Men*. The religious leaders of the day condemned Matthew as a traitor. He would have been considered ritually unclean and forbidden to enter any synagogue. By all accounts, Matthew was highly despised and labeled a sinner.

But, you see, Jesus came for sinners.

Matthew did not hesitate in answering Jesus' call. Immediately he followed. There would be no turning back for Matthew, either. He would not be able to return to his tax collectors booth (unlike the fishermen who left their nets to follow Jesus). His decision was definite. And sacrificial.

He accepted Jesus' invitation in an instant! Imagine! **HE** was actually **CHOSEN** by someone—especially *this* Someone! How refreshing it must have been, not to be met with contempt and scorn!

So what did he do? He threw a party.

Why do you throw a party? To celebrate!

Matthew invited all of his friends—all the social outcasts, low-lives, and hoodlums in the village—to celebrate a new life. A soon-to-be changed life.

Why did the guest list include all the undesirables? They were all he knew! But Jesus didn't mind. It didn't dissuade Him one bit!

Matthew wanted his friends to meet Jesus and he wanted to celebrate his new calling...his new hope...his new life in Christ. He celebrated the old life left behind and the promised new life ahead.

John MacArthur further explains: "[Matthew] dropped everything immediately when he met Jesus, and in the joy of his newfound [life] and relationship, he embraced the outcasts of this world and introduced them to Jesus."

Jesus said *follow Me*, and Matthew responded with willingness, commitment, and obedience. That best sums up how **all** disciples should respond to Jesus.

Consider this, however: If Matthew was thought to be the worst humanity had to offer, and Jesus didn't think twice about befriending him, shouldn't that ignite an exuberant hope in all of us?

It's certainly a hope worthy of a grand celebration!

An All-Things-New Kind of Touch

Think for a moment about how much a human changes physically. Through all the stages of development—from conception to birth and beyond—the outward appearance noticeably changes.

Many people whom Jesus healed were changed externally as well (like lepers, for instance). But the disciples He changed from the inside out. He changed their character...their attitudes...their hearts. *But wouldn't you consider this change to be just as visible?*

The list quickly grows long when you think about all the change Jesus brought about. Why, He changed the whole face of religion. And it started with the religious leaders.

With the calling of His disciples, the old order was about to change. The change Jesus would usher in would change the leaders of religion from that of an exclusive, elite sect of trained, law-abiding priests who inherited their position, to that of ordinary men (albeit Spirit-led) who chose to obey Jesus' calling.

I find it rather ironic that Matthew's Jewish name is Levi. As you may know, the tribe of Levi was one of the original twelve tribes of Israel. Appointed by God, they comprised the Levitical priesthood. Matthew was among the first in a new priesthood, under a new covenant. And the method of relating to God was also changed by Jesus—from one of religiosity to one of relationship.

When Jesus touched Matthew, He birthed in him a great hope and means for change. He would not only change the man, but his life...*eternally*.

Matthew experienced the ultimate touch of Jesus upon every follower: the touch of transformation.

Jesus changed Matthew's life, his purpose, and his heart. He was transformed from sinner and tax collector to disciple, apostle, preacher, author, and missionary. From most despised and ostracized to respected church leader.

Matthew fully embraced a redeemed life...because he *lived* a changed life.

Transformation is God's will for every Christian—that, more and more, they all become Christ-like.

Dr. Gregg Hood made this statement in his book, *Take God at His Word*: "Here's the bottom line: God is in the people business. More than anything He wants us to become like His Son, Jesus. To do this He will love us, bless us, discipline us, and develop us by the power of His Holy Spirit so that we become all He wants us to be."

Jesus is the Glory of God and as you allow Him to touch you, He transforms you **for** His glory and **to reflect** His glory.

Reflect upon how Jesus' touch has changed you. **Recognize** that change and openly share with others the difference He makes in your life. And **remember** that He continues to do so.

Then, like Matthew, rejoice!

Rejoice that the old has gone and the new has come—in Christ Jesus. That He has provided a means for our forgiveness, salvation, and adoption into His family.

And celebrate, with great joy, every sinner-turned-saint!

Jesus' Touch Upon a Parent's Faith

Jairus can represent to us the parent who is desperate over the well-being of their child. His story reveals Jesus' touch upon faith...and His heart for both parent and child.

Jairus was a synagogue leader. Some translations call him a "ruler." He can be viewed as a type of governor of the synagogue. None of that mattered, however, when his daughter fell ill. Faith carried him to his only option—Jesus. Jairus fell at the feet of Jesus, desperate for the healing of his dying daughter.

He came to Jesus in humility. And he came in faith. He believed Jesus could heal his daughter from the point of death. At this point, however, no precedent of Jesus raising the dead had been established.

This event, recorded in three of the four gospels, includes the account of another healing conducted along the way to Jairus' home. And both have much to teach us on matters of faith.

Jesus told the woman who attempted an elusive touch for her healing, "Your faith has made you well" (within the hearing of Jairus, I might add). And Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not be afraid; just believe and she will be healed" (Lk 8:48, 50).

There are several similarities mentioned in both healings—the most common factor being that of faith.

Jairus petitioned Jesus to save his child's life. As do we! We pray for the salvation that comes only through Jesus Christ. In faith, we carry our concerns for our children to their only Hope. And with the mounting challenges and grievous concerns of this age, it is ever more vital we partner with God through prayer—in faith.

In fact, one of the greatest responsibilities we have as a parent is prayer. And yet, it is one of God's greatest gifts, as well.

When Jesus arrived at Jairus' home, He was met with scoffing mourners on the scene. The description of the "commotion and wailing" is a depiction of inconsolable grief. There is no more dreadful noise than that of hopeless mourning. But Hope has come—as He did that day—to save a precious child.

And that is the faith that comes from knowing Christ Jesus. For those who have received the salvation that comes through Jesus, parents need not despair. Their life does not end in death. Rather, the touch of Jesus is one that can raise the dead.

Interceding—faith-fully and fervently

We've seen how Jairus handled the death of his daughter. And we read how Jesus performed a miraculous raising in response. Then we delved into matters of faith and prayer. Now, let's look deeper into prayer and further consider intercession. After all, that is another lesson to be learned from Jairus.

When his daughter lay dying, he interceded on her behalf and carried her before the Sovereign Lord, pleading His mercy and grace to save her. We have that obligation for our children and loved ones. But we also have the great honor and privilege to stand in the gap for others. Two key attitudes in prayer we learn from Jairus are humility and faith. There is another essential element most worthy of our consideration and use—Scripture.

We are taught by Jesus to pray in faith, according to God's will...and both come by the Word.

Therefore, the Bible, among other invaluable things, is a book of prayer. It is the most powerful tool we have as a parent and an intercessor—both for wisdom and confidence in praying God's will.

Look to the examples of intercessors in the Bible and infuse your prayers with the power of the Word.

Pray, most fervently and faith-fully. Heed the words of Jesus to His disciples to "pray and not give up" (Lk 18:1). And entrust your petition into God's sovereign care . . . with the peace that comes from confident faith.

Fellowship for the Different Kind

Adversity has a way of driving people to Jesus.

It was adversity that caused a Greek woman on a particular day long ago to plead His mercy (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). She was desperate for His blessing for her family—blessings which were primarily extended to “the lost sheep of Israel.”

She approached the place in Tyre where the Son of David convened with His disciples. She, the different, entered their presence with a courage and a confidence to be commended. She was, after all, a Gentile entering the company of Jews. And she was a woman entering the company of men. But faith drove her forward, ever hopeful God’s Messiah would bestow mercy upon her suffering daughter.

She crossed the barriers of race, gender, and religion when she crossed that room to get to Jesus in order to make her request.

And how did that end for her? Jesus tested her sincerity and faith; but she persisted with wit and tenacity.

The encounter was rather unique, to say the least. And the response from Jesus puzzling. But it served its purposes. It served to test her. It served to teach the disciples. And it set the stage for the greater work of reunification Jesus was yet to do.

From the beginning, the promise of reconciliation to God and redemption from the curse of sin was intended for all people of every nation. God chose the Savior to fulfill that promise through the bloodline of Abraham (Gn 12:2-3; 18:18). Over the course of time, a great divide developed that would need closing.

Jesus was working His way toward that end when she came—bearing her differences. However, at this point in Jesus’ ministry, His focus was on Israel (Mt 10:6; 22:9). The message would later be delivered to the Gentiles through the Apostles (Ac 1:8). But for this woman, on that day, it was still a Jew vs. Gentile mentality, when it came to how the promise of God was errantly perceived.

Overcoming differences has always presented a challenge. However, in Christ, God extends the promise for reconciliation . . . and fellowship of the different. And whenever His people gather together, they provide opportunity for others to bring their concerns and their requests to Jesus.

God has given a resounding “Yes!” to His every promise, through Jesus. And, as Jesus extended a hearty “Yes!” to that Greek woman, He does so to all the different who come to Him seeking mercy.

Grafting Grace

The Apostles were to take the Gospel out of Jerusalem...to all the different people in all the world. But much teaching needed to be done before that could happen. At one point in His ministry, Jesus led the disciples out into the Gentile country of Tyre to train them privately. It was in the course of one such occasion that a Greek woman boldly entered their company in search of the Lord's mercy (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30).

The classroom was set. And the master Rabbi went to work.

It would take time—and the Holy Spirit—to undo centuries of learning that separated Jew and Gentile. But in God's eyes there was no difference. And the disciples needed to see it that way, too. They needed to see that the Promise of God was always intended for all people.

God, wanting all to be saved (1 Tm 2:4), made a promise that salvation would come through the lineage of David. From Abraham, down through the ages, God kept His covenant with a people who birthed His Promise into the world. The Jewish nation was to remain set apart for the expressed purpose of God. Into the world a Savior would be born to reunite man to their God. A world of two camps—Jew and Gentile.

After Jesus reconciled man to God through His blood shed on the cross, there still remained a hostile divide. Therefore, He provided the means of reuniting what had become severed.

The analogy Paul used in Romans 11 of the method of God to merge all nationalities back into the promise chain was one of grafting. Because, when you want to join two separate things so that they appear to grow as one single thing, grafting is your method of choice. It's not only a brilliant choice for success horticulturally, but theologically, as well.

When Jesus granted the request of the foreign woman, He showed the disciples that "God would show mercy upon whom He would show mercy" (Rm 9:15) and that the blessings of God are not reserved for the few and the same, but for all—even the different. Because, really, being different is what we all have in common.

Grafting, through faith in Jesus, is the touch of God's grace upon the nations to reunite all God's children—to become His children of the promise.

Won't you share that touch with someone different? You can do so by sharing with them the gospel, uniting words with power to save.

Who Will Follow?

Would-Bes, Could-Bes, Should-Bes, this almost sounds like the opening line to a bad joke. But, when it's paired with disciple, it becomes a terrible oxymoron!

Let's peek-in on the encounter of Jesus with three "Would-be Disciples." (They should-have-been and could-have-been, but never were—because they failed to commit.)

Luke 9:57-62 reads, "As they were walking along the road, a man said to [Jesus], "I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Much can be learned from these three responses.

The first Would-Be Disciple neglected to calculate the cost of following Jesus. He had no idea where following Jesus would lead. Jesus is pleased with a faith that follows. But not blind faith. Jesus touched this first man with honesty. He wanted him to know that there was a cost—sacrificially so. Was he willing to commit, knowing comfort was not to be guaranteed?

The second Would-Be Disciple had misaligned priorities. When he said, "first," he placed something else ahead of discipleship. Was he possibly stalling because he didn't really want to do it at all? Or did he want to follow, but only on his terms? Either way, his procrastination (equivalent to delayed obedience) wasn't really obedience at all.

The third Would-Be Disciple had his sights set in the wrong direction entirely—he was looking back. His "yeah, but first" was another no-no. It amounted to partial obedience. (Hardly the whole-hearted commitment Jesus was looking for.)

In the *Parable of the Great Banquet* recorded in Luke 14:16-24, three men were invited to a banquet. They gave three excuses for not attending. Each represented an earthly obstacle: possessions, work, and relationships. These same three things can keep people from committing to discipleship because they have the capacity to create conflict.

A good practice to help test priorities is to use Matthew 6:33 as a standard of measure. Call it the 633 Rule. This means asking yourself honestly whether you are seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

It's a practice that's continually repeated—because priorities are notorious for changing.

When a rich young ruler counted the cost of discipleship to be too high, he walked away (Mt 19:16ff). Others have allowed family, work, or possessions detract from following. *What about you?*

A Touch Custom-Fit to Every Occasion

In the “touches” we’ve considered this far, Jesus has been patient and compassionate. In the exchange found in Luke 9, there’s a shift in tone, which is understandable when you realize the context (see verses 51-56).

As the Cross looms large on the horizon for Jesus, time is of the essence. He has an urgency about teaching on matters of discipleship. At this critical stage in His ministry, Jesus wouldn’t be trivialized by the undecided or uncommitted.

Faith demonstrated by the profiles we’ve examined up to this point have been admirable and noteworthy. That’s not the case with these Would-Bes, however. This is a wake-up call for disciples to learn from them rather than emulate them.

The touch of Jesus with each of the Would-Bes was custom-fit to each excuse.

Jesus met one Would-Be with honesty about discipleship. One, He met with correction. And the other was met with a stern rebuke.

The touch of Jesus upon His followers equips, empowers, and enables. That’s a promise! But that’s not to say that it’s easy! We must be honest about that. After all, Jesus was. His teaching is clear and concise about the demands of discipleship. But it is worth it—whatever the cost.

Jesus didn’t implore, beg, plead, coerce, or manipulate followers. He simply cast an invitation and kept walking. People either followed...or were left to their poor excuses.

There is another important aspect of discipleship to be considered: its duality. Jesus stated both “Come” and “Go”. To draw near and to go out on mission. We are to *become* disciples and *make* disciples.

It’s a touch we are given . . . to share—closely following each step of the way.

Who is it that really needs to see?

Context is everything.

When you see where something is placed, you can understand it more fully. Because often, what surrounds it gives it clarity.

Where something is strategically placed also adds a powerful emphasis. Making it even more noticeable.

Take the story of Bartimaeus, for instance (Mk 10:46-52).

When you “see” where it’s located in Mark’s gospel, it enhances the bigger picture of what our spiritual eyesight is meant to see. Because it’s something God desperately wants to reveal to us.

Mark frames crucial content about our Lord with similar accounts. A common theme is woven throughout the text of various encounters Jesus had near the end of His earthly ministry, on His final journey to Jerusalem. The frames I’ve labeled “bookends.”

Let’s look at them together...

Bookend #1 - Mark 8:22-26 - Jesus heals a blind man

Mark 8:31-33 - Jesus reveals His coming death and resurrection

Mark 9:30-32 - Jesus reveals His coming death and resurrection

Mark 10:32-34 - Jesus reveals His coming death and resurrection

Mark 10:35-41 - James and John request position

Bookend #2 - Mark 10:46-52 - Jesus heals a blind man

The bookends are two healings of physical eyesight. They frame Jesus’ predictions of His forthcoming crucifixion and resurrection. In between are four accounts of those afflicted with spiritual blindness.

The bookends of the physically blind hold up, like a billboard, the accounts of the spiritually blind. Only Jesus is able to restore both afflictions.

Jesus wanted His disciples to see what was coming—but they could not see. And when

James and John sought position in the coming kingdom, Jesus posed the same question to them that He did to Bartimaeus: "What do you want Me to do for you?"

The blind beggar cried out to the Lord. Of all the things he could have requested, he asked to see.

Are you asking for a blessing that's not forthcoming? Or seeking resolution or healing that you've waited and waited for? In those times, maybe we are to simply ask for eyes that see?

Because really, aren't we all blind beggars?

Don't we all need Jesus to restore our spiritual blindness—that we may see His glory...His will...His truth?

Oh, for us to heed the advice in Proverbs, as did dear Bartimaeus: "Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God" (Prv 2:3-5).

Faulty Vision

Some could see . . . some couldn't.

Some saw only some of the time . . . but others, not at all.

Some saw in part . . . none the whole.

Some just plain refused . . . or denied what they did see.

With physical vision, there's a rating system—perfection being rated as 20/20. I'm not sure there is such a system for spiritual eyesight.

I think there is a point when we're all blind spiritually. Until we allow the light of Jesus to shine within, then the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to see.

But now we only see in part . . . until we see our glorious Lord face-to-face.

Keep seeking . . . asking . . . praying. Because, sometimes, it's not a matter of the eyes at all . . . but the heart.

The disciples often had difficulty seeing what Jesus wanted them to see (take His three death predictions, for example). There were those rare occasions when they glimpsed His identity or His purpose—temporarily shimmering like a beacon.

The Emmaus-bound fellows couldn't see who their traveling companion was at first. Then Jesus opened their eyes.

Jesus had to first blind Saul for him to finally be able to see.

But the exchange Jesus had with the Pharisees divulged willful blindness, resulting from pride. For that, Jesus issued a dire warning of its eventual judgment.

The New Testament has numerous records of Jesus restoring eyesight—whether through miraculous healing or spiritual revelation. Only there can we learn of both cause and remedy.

To gain understanding, we must rely on its Source. Training our spiritual vision, by setting our sights on the unseen, can only be done through the visual aids of the Holy Spirit and His light. And to set our sights is to fix our hearts and minds on the eternal things of the kingdom of God and His Christ.

There is more than one way to see—with physical eyes and with spiritual eyes. One

may work . . . and the other not. Or the other work . . . and the former not. Both options are tragic.

But both are touchable by the Healer, our eye-opening, sight-restoring Savior.

More Than Physical Healing

In this series, we've read about several healings Jesus performed. No two healings were alike. They were each as different as the individual need.

The touch of Jesus always served more than just the physical healing. There was typically a deeper need He met. The nameless woman who reached to touch but the edge of Jesus' cloak (Mk 5:24b-34) was no exception.

The woman was only one of many in the pressing crowd. And yet, she was not lost in the crowd.

Although Jesus never touched this woman, she was healed nonetheless.

She suffered for a long time. Over the course of twelve long years, she tried every remedy. She exhausted every option available to her, to no avail. Her affliction was incurable.

The disease, the hemorrhage she suffered, also made her a social outcast. Deemed unclean, she would have been ostracized socially, relationally, and religiously.

I don't believe it's a stretch to say she was desperate. But she wasn't entirely without hope. So, in hope, she *r e a c h e d*—acting on her faith in this Jesus.

Jesus was touched by many in the crowd . . . but her touch was different. Hers was a touch of **hope**. And the faith that motivated that touch released **power**. . . power to instantly heal.

Jesus noticed.

Jesus' power was sufficient for her healing. He could have kept moving. But He stopped. He wanted more. More from her . . . and more for her.

Jesus wanted her confession. He wanted her to admit—publicly—that she needed Him.

Because faith should be expressed.

It's not meant to be kept to oneself.

It's one thing to believe in Jesus, but it's quite another to admit it.

When we willingly testify to our need of Jesus before others, proclaiming what He has done for us, He is honored . . . and pleased.

It was only *after* she told Him "the whole truth" that she received the real blessing—for it was only after her confession that Jesus spoke to her. If she had missed that, she would have denied herself His greater blessing: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

He touched her through her confession. And blessed her for it.

And He longs to do the same for you.

Confessions for His Glory

Confession, from the Greek verb *homologeō*, is also used as “a profession.” *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary* states that it means “to speak the same thing, agree with; admit; to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts.”

Confessions can be made regarding guilt or sin. But they can also have a positive connotation, such as “celebrating with praise.”

A profession of praise for God’s deliverance can be traced all the way back to the Exodus with the Song of Miriam and Moses (Ex 15). God gave them cause and the song for worship—with the intention of it being passed on to future generations.

When the suffering woman reached for Jesus’ hem (Mk 5:24-34), it was as if to say, “I need You, Lord. My hope is in You!” And she was healed. But Jesus did not allow it to go unnoticed. He wanted her confession—her willingness to admit it.

Are you willing to confess what Jesus has done for you?

Do you find yourself timid? Afraid?

Jesus empowers the timid to testify.

Our discomfort (and our pride) unfortunately tends to lock lips. They can stifle our confession—stealing rightful praise belonging to God for His many good deeds.

We don’t know why this woman was unable to ask Jesus for healing. But, when prompted by Him, she declared the truth . . . the “whole truth.”

And, because she did, several fruitful things were accomplished—for her, for Him, and for others. Jesus was glorified. She received compassion and commendation for her faith. And others witnessed the healing power of Jesus.

Your confession can accomplish much, too—bringing praise and glory to the Lord.

Unbinding the Raised

She came to me with a frown as big as Texas. And those eyes, speckled with gold, pooled with giant tears.

Tightly knotted in her little hand was a necklace—a treasured gift from her father.

She begged me to help her fix it.

My greater concern, however, was for that tender heart of hers, more tangled up in knots than the chain. It was heart-wrenching to see that child's mind bound with worry.

But because of its importance to my young daughter, I carefully worked those knots. As I did, I gently offered reassurance to unbind the knots within her and set her mind free from the worry that entangled it. As each knot loosened, she too became unbound from the fears that gripped her.

In the grand scheme of things, it may seem trivial now. But, at the time, it was significant to her. And because it mattered to her, it mattered to me. And because it caused her such misery, I was determined to put that smile back in her heart.

Because no one should be bound. Especially a friend of Jesus.

(Excerpt from The Jesus Touch, page 154)

This flawed heart toward my young daughter over a necklace pales in comparison to Jesus. The thought merely magnifies the perfect heart of Jesus toward His friend, as he stumbled from the grave, all bound up in grave clothes.

How do you think Jesus felt to see one He loved all wrapped up in death, the enemy of the One so named the Resurrection and the Life?

The account of Lazarus' raising in John 11 bares Jesus' humanity like no other gospel record. His heart for the Father, His heart for a friend, His heart toward death is laid bare before our eyes, exposing raw emotions of the Son of Man. It is there we read of Him being "deeply moved and troubled." It is there we see Him weep.

Jesus is deeply sorrowful over death—especially those dead in transgressions. Or worse, those dead in their faith.

Lazarus was held captive behind the rock of death's chamber. Jesus called upon those on the scene to remove the stone that blocked out light. And, with a divine, all-powerful calling, Lazarus was raised to new life. But he emerged still all tangled up in death . . . bound and hindered from walking freely. For that, Jesus yet again involved the onlookers to unloose His bound friend.

Jesus could have completed this miracle—start to finish—completely on His own. Why, He could

have even done it days earlier, from a distance. But He chose to involve others.

Have you ever wondered why?

The answer to that question is explored in-depth in Week Nine of *The Jesus Touch*. We will briefly ponder its answer in the next post. But for today, consider the miracle. Praise Jesus for His power—and His victory—over death. And give thanks for the promise of our own resurrection.

But contemplate your faith-life.

Is it vibrant? Alive? Or has it gone cold . . . dead?

Is it bound up in doubt, guilt, worry, fear, apathy?

Jesus can help there, too. With a mighty raising, He can revive a dead faith. With truth, He can unloose what binds your faith.

Shall we, for today, pray for one another? Pray for a faith that is free . . . active . . . pleasing to the Father? Let's pray against what binds our sisters.

Through the waters of baptism, we are buried and raised in Christ Jesus to LIVE eternally. He longs for you to live . . . *really live*. He died that you might have abundant life. And He rose so that death won't have the last word over our lives.

Jesus has emphatically declared, "The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die" (Jn 11:25-26).

Do you believe?

Fellowship in Ministry

The intended design of this Bible study is to consider the touch of Jesus upon those He encountered so we can share that touch with those in need around us.

This fellowship with Jesus in ministry, a collaboration of sorts, is actively modeled for us in this biblical account of the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-45).

Verse 44 in the King James Version reads, "And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith **unto them**, 'Loose him, and let him go.'"

After Jesus asked **them** to roll the stone away and He called Lazarus to wake up, Jesus invited **them** to unbind him.

Granted, there are some things only Jesus can do . . . like raise the dead. But there are some things others can do in fellowship with Him. Things we are welcomed to do. Allowed to do. Instructed to do.

We can summon Jesus, like the sisters did (vs 3), through prayer. And we can "unloose" someone by ministering in His name to those whose faith is bound.

Be of good courage, saint. Jesus still raises the spiritually dead—those whose faith has gone cold, stiff, and lifeless as a corpse.

And Jesus still raises those dead in sin—those dead-set in sinful habits, that stink worse than a four-day-old corpse. Sometimes we write them off though, don't we? But no one is bound beyond the power of Jesus. Beyond the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

The infinitely powerful and sovereign Lord can do all things for a sinner alone; but He has called us into fellowship **with Him**. He could have rolled that stone away by Himself. He could have removed the wrappings by His very word (the same word that raised dead Lazarus!). But He asked those around to partner with Him in caring for the one He loved. He granted that they share in the blessing of the miracle.

Jesus asked His disciples to remove what bound His friend. To help with what blinded him and kept him from walking in newness of life. There are a great number of things that bind Christians today. There are people, for one reason or another, who are walking around all bound up.

We have been given the honorable privilege and responsibility to participate with Jesus in ministering to those in the Body who are bound by the troubles of this world.

Won't you help move the burden that holds them in dark places?

Won't you help remove what blinds them from seeing Jesus?

Won't you share the very compassionate touch of Jesus to remove what keeps them bound, by leading them to the help they desperately need to be able to walk free?

Jesus longs to use you. Yes, even you!

But if it's you, dear friend, who finds your faith dead . . . bound, won't you walk out of that dreadful place into the light? Drag yourself to someone who knows Jesus, so they can pray for you and summon the touch of Jesus to awaken you to rise and walk free . . . unbound.

When wounds come

The week ahead stretched out before him like a grueling Greek marathon.

The days of the Festival were quite possibly the hardest days of the year—especially for those serving at the Temple.

Chaos, commotion, and crowds were bound to be a test in perseverance. With a die-hard commitment belonging to the youth of his age, he determined to serve the High Priest to the best of his abilities. So, when the command came, he was eager to do his duty.

He followed this man, Judas, leading them. But behind him were an assortment of temple officials and a whole detachment of soldiers.

The short jaunt to the olive grove seemed pleasant enough; but then it all became a blur.

First a kiss, then words exchanged. Tensions flared in the dark, then a flash. In that one surreal moment, he groped for understanding—anything that made sense—only to find some sticky substance trickling down his neck.

But then . . . peace. Order was instantly restored by the mere touch from the Man he was sent to arrest.

(Excerpt from The Jesus Touch, page 173)

Malchus, a servant of the high priest, was injured by another servant of the High Priest, Jesus.

It's fascinating when you think about it. It's as if the old priesthood clashed head-on with the new, up-and-coming priesthood. One servant of God vs another . . . over Jesus. The temple authorities, the old "church", if you will, vs the new Church.

What's even more amazing is the fact that Malchus, leading a pack of those who came to arrest Jesus, yet Jesus healed him anyway.

The last person Jesus healed at the end of His earthly ministry was the one injured on His account. After all, wasn't Malchus just doing his job? (*Caiaphas was likely one "boss" you wouldn't want to offend!*). He had a critical role in "fulfilling all Scripture."

Malchus was not only healed by Jesus but defended by Him.

And the rebuke Jesus had for His servant Peter is one that echoes through the ages: weapons have no place in service of the kingdom of Christ.

But when woundedness comes, we can rest assured that our Just Defender will right every wrong committed in His Name.

Serving zealously . . . and wound-free

The wounding came in the line of duty.
Religious duty, nonetheless.

But the Lord, the Prince of Peace, made things right.
He reached out and touched Malchus' ear.
In that touch was power to heal.
In that touch was the ability to restore order and peace.
In that touch He took control of a volatile situation.
In that touch, He defended a servant merely doing his job.
And offered another a stern warning.

Christians have been wounded in serving the Body . . . too often.
And not just across denominations or from other churches.
No, sometimes it happens within the same church family.

Have you endured an offense in serving the Lord's Church?

Jesus is your Defender.
He will defend hurtful attacks and unjust acts of violence.
He can heal every wound inflicted.

He can be trusted.

And as we trust, we can forgive. We can learn how to prevent further offense . . . and keep on serving.

Just how do we avoid hurting others in our zeal to serve the Lord?

One-Another-ness. By learning to live by the one-another passages recorded for our instruction and maturity. *(There's certainly an ample supply!)*

Is it that simple?
Yes!

Is it easy?
No!

It takes intentional discipline and conscious choices.
Only then can we avoid hurting others in our service.

Yeah, serve with zeal—
but humbly
and gently
in love.

Choose Your Touch

It was Friday, the 15th of Nisan.

The end of His life looked much like the whole of it: confrontations with both belief and mockery. Wonder and scorn.

There, atop Golgotha's crest, pride and humility met their Savior. These dueling dispositions collide at the Cross of Christ.

(Excerpt from The Jesus Touch, page 199)

The two crosses on either side of Jesus can represent the choice placed before all of humanity: that of life or death.

But the question is: what attitude will we have before the Crucified Savior—humility or pride?

On one cross, a sinner died . . . proud, mocking.

On the other, a sinner humbled himself before Jesus . . . believing. He received a promise. He received the saving touch of Jesus.

Many attitudes surrounded the Cross that day. But these two contrasts emanating nearest the Cross are most noteworthy, for they confront us with the ultimate decision our Lord asks of us.

The crosses force us to address pride, the cancer-of-the-heart.

Jesus honored the choice of the proud to die a sinner's death. He would remain forever untouched by Jesus because he refused Jesus' saving touch of life.

So, we not only choose our attitude, but the responding touch of Jesus. May the end result of Golgotha's three crosses inform your choice.

The only person who could justifiably boast was Jesus. But He chose not to. He took on the nature of a loving servant. He "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Php 2:8). His humility never stopped short, even in His suffering. It endured . . . to His final breath.

Treasure His words regarding pride: "Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Mt 23:12).

And remember the two, dying on a cross. When you do, remember the choice to be made—the choice between humility vs. pride. And choose the attitude which receives the gracious touch of Jesus.

Saying Farewell to New Friends

Their names leapt off the page—as if to come alive for us to make their acquaintance, didn't they?! And the more we studied and came to know them in their circumstance, the more real they became.

Excitement stirs at the very thought that they actually saw **Jesus**. Met Him face-to-face. Were touched by Him.

He, in turn, met their need—physically and spiritually. He also taught each one valuable lessons from the encounter. Lessons relevant today.

It almost saddens me to bid farewell to these somewhat familiar friends. Familiar, because they each represent something of mankind in all of us. See if you agree. There was:

- Anna, the Devoted
- John, the Persecuted
- Philip, the Useful
- Matthew, the Changed
- Jairus, the Desperate Parent
- A Greek Woman, the Different
- Would-Be Disciples, the Uncommitted
- Bartimaeus, the Blind
- A Suffering Woman, the Hopeful
- Lazarus, the Bound
- Malchus, the Wounded
- Caiaphas and a Criminal, the Proud

Can you, to some degree, identify with any of them? Can you relate to someone's need? The way they approached Jesus? Or possibly the way He responded to them . . . touched them?

Jesus touched those with faith to believe. They have received their reward and are now rejoicing in His glorious presence forevermore.

Wouldn't you just love to pull up a chair and hear about "that time Jesus came by and . . ."? We can tell them we read their story and were encouraged by it. In fact, we might even thank them for it!

Yes, it will feel like old times with good friends.

But we must not forget the lessons we learned from the untouchables—those who refused Jesus' touch. But, like the criminal who came to faith with his dying breath, there is always hope for repentance.

I pray you've sensed the touch of the Lord's presence as you've searched the Scriptures. I sincerely thank you for joining me on the journey. I issue one closing charge: keep your hearts tuned for those in need of His touch—and do share it . . . freely and often.

Jesus will be most pleased you did.

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