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*Disciple-making 101: A 90 Day Challenge*  
*Ordinary Things*  
Luke 13-19

Ordinary things... refrigerator door fell off on me this morning. It doesn't get more ordinary than ketchup and salsa bottles all over the floor at 5:30 in the morning.

Someone teased with me the other day about how I have been pounding away on the 90 Day Challenge. He was only joking, but I suppose it is true. I am talking about it every week, because I am trying to help us develop life-giving habits that will transform our discipleship and disciple-making. They say that if you do something 30 days in a row, it becomes a habit. Well, for 90 days we are reading a chapter of the gospels every day and asking two questions: what do I learn about Jesus and what do I learn about disciple-making? Accountability?

The Holy Spirit is teaching us a lot as a congregation about how to make disciples. Still, the idea of disciple-making can be daunting. Especially if you are newer in the Lord, you might say, "I don't know enough about Jesus to share! I'm afraid I'll get it wrong. I don't want to be responsible for someone rejecting Jesus because I didn't have the right answers." We talked about this last week and I think all of us can relate to that. Some believe that, unless you have a seminary education, you aren't qualified to share. Maybe they're right. I was reading what someone wrote about a verse from Luke 15, one of our chapters from last week, and I was confused. Listen:

"The verb-subject word order here is the first of at least nine instances of this more Semitic word order in the parable. The concentration, though not the phenomenon as such, counts against Lukan formulation. The legal use of τὸ ἐπιβάλλον μέρος, "the portion due," is documented in the papyri and inscriptions by Pöhlmann. The word used for "estate" (βίος) also means "life," "manner of life," "means of subsistence." The estate is what supports the life of the family. The legalities and the social consequences of such a settlement upon the younger son in the lifetime of his father have been painstakingly and repeatedly analyzed, but without the emergence of a clear consensus on some of the main points...."

That is certainly one way to understand Luke 15...or not. Let me share another. If you have your Bibles, I want you to close them, turn off your iPhones. I want you to just listen to these stories from God's Word.

<sup>1</sup>Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear [Jesus]. <sup>2</sup>But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup>Then Jesus told them this parable:

<sup>4</sup>“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup>I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup>“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup>In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

<sup>11</sup>Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup>“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup>After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup>“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ <sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

<sup>27</sup>“Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.” <sup>28</sup>“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

<sup>29</sup>“But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>“But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

<sup>31</sup>“My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

<sup>32</sup>“But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

So that was different, wasn't it? Why? Why did it feel different? Because, we listened to it as a story. Just like the first disciples would have listened as Jesus told it; looking into his eyes, listening to the inflection in his voice, allowing their imagination to enter into the story. Is this complicated to understand? No. What is the theme? Lost things being found, right? Valuable things are lost; ordinary but valuable: a sheep, a coin, a son... two sons, really, isn't that right? Both sons were lost, just in different ways.

Ordinary but valuable things are lost, and someone goes looking for them with resolution and passion. The shepherd won't give up until he finds the lost sheep, and then he joyfully puts it on his shoulders to carry it home. The woman won't give up until she finds her coin. And the father never stops watching for his wandering son. That's why, “when he was still a long way off, he saw him, was filled with compassion for him, ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” Isn't that one of the most wonderful lines in the Bible? And every one of these “findings” ends with a huge party, right?

There is nothing complicated about this, but it is so deep. It evokes heartfelt responses, doesn't it? With whom do you identify in these stories? Are you the lost sheep that is so beleaguered, you need to be carried back home? Are you the young son who is squandering opportunities and have ended up in a pig sty in shame? Or the elder son who has always followed the rules and resents those who don't? Or the father, longing for the return of your children, trying to draw them back into the safety of your loving relationship? Which is your story?

Simple stories... profound stories... this was the genius of Jesus' teaching. He used ordinary things to make extraordinary points. Just from this last week: a fig tree, a mustard seed, an ox, a donkey, a banquet, a contractor building a tower, a king fighting a battle, a lost sheep, a lost coin, two lost sons... ordinary things.

Don't you find it interesting that when Jesus taught, he did so clearly and simply with ordinary, everyday examples that anyone could understand if they had the heart to do so? And still, he was perceived as someone who spoke with great authority—compared to the religious leaders who could argue complex theological points—and yet were so spiritually dense, they could not recognize the Kingdom of God when the King was standing right in front of them.

The power of the gospel of Jesus is that it is ordinary and simple... and yet deep. We try to make it too hard. We have complicated charts and systematic theologies and DVDs that explain everything in minutiae. And I wonder if more of us grasped the simplicity with which Jesus shared the truths of the Kingdom, would we be less frightened and more willing to talk about Jesus? If the parables of Jesus—which speak about Kingdom life using ordinary things—teach us anything it is this: you don't have to be a seminary-trained Bible scholar to share what Jesus has done in your life.

Last week we noted how Jesus asked great questions in order to make disciples. I wonder if these parables don't pose three questions to us this morning:

First, could you tell the stories of Jesus? If someone wanted to know how God feels about people who are lost in sin and rebellion, could you tell the story of the Prodigal Son? If someone wanted to know how we should treat the outsider that everyone else ignores, could you tell the Good Samaritan? If someone wanted to know how badly God wants to welcome people into a relationship with Him, could you tell the story of the Great Banquet? One of the benefits of the 90 Day Challenge is that it has plunged us into the teachings of Jesus. When he told his apostles to "Go and make disciples of all nations," teaching them to observe all that he had commanded them... doesn't it assume that we remember what Jesus commanded? What would happen if, as you continue your 90 Day Challenge, you practiced telling some of these great stories to each other? How about in your LifeGroups this week... practice with each other!

Second question: Can you tell your own story? If you are a disciple of Jesus, do you have a three minute version of how God found you, how you responded to His love, how you have been changed as a result... and the difference it has made in the lives of those around you? One of the most powerful disciple-making tools you possess is your own story of how Jesus saved and changed you. No one can argue with that because you are the expert on you. But if you have never tried to put it in words, will you miss the chance when someone wants hear your story of salvation? What if this week, in your quiet time, you jotted down your story and practiced it with your spouse or friend?

Third question: Can you translate the ordinary stories of your life into spiritual principles? Can you see God's hand at work in the day to day experiences of your life and store them away as your own parables to be shared with others? One man

shared with me how his mom got a traffic ticket, and she realized that this was a God-message telling her she was rushing through life from thing to thing and needed to slow down.

My son Cooper and I have been sharing the 90 Day Challenge by e-mail. I asked him about the passage where Jesus cursed the Capernaum and other cities because they had been witness to his miracles but never repented. Here is how he responded:

“An example I can think of is when a kid covets another kid's X-box, and only hangs out with him just to play on his X-box. He is completely ignoring the relationship he could have with the kid that owns it. It seems Capernaum and those other cities were too into Jesus's X-box (miracles) and not into Jesus himself. Jesus wants us to be into him.”

Pretty good, huh? There is a place for seminary training and deep theological reflection. I'm glad; I wouldn't have a job otherwise. But sometimes we overthink this disciple-making thing. We make it so complicated and so daunting that we freeze up. If we could ever come to realize that we have a story about what Jesus has done for us—a story of our ordinary life touched by an extraordinary Lord—it might transform the way we think about disciple-making.

There is nothing much more ordinary than a pair of running shoes, and I've asked my friend, Betsy Hunt, to come and share her story with you.

“Thanks Mark for asking about my story and allowing me to share some of it.

“In 2000, I met Laurie Dawson in a Chapel Hill small group, and we soon became friends. She shared her stories about Burma and Thailand, and I was captured by her love for this part of the world. She mentored me as I continued to learn more, and this culminated in a trip to the Thai-Burma border in 2002; I had the chance to experience what she had told me firsthand.

“In 2004, Chapel Hill held the inaugural Run for Relief for Burma. I was part of the team that launched that event, and have been involved ever since, both as a runner and behind-the-scenes administrator. Now, this run is held throughout the world.

“And God has continued to stretch me through this ministry. In 2013, I once again had the privilege of traveling to the Thai-Burma border with a team that included my husband and daughter. I visited a Bible college within a refugee camp, heard the stories of Burmese children who are now in Thailand at a hostel and school, and shared some of my testimony in a women's prison in Bangkok. I also had a long hike to a Thai village—on a very hot and humid day over hilly, rough terrain.

“These experiences have been some of the hardest in my life, but as I have trusted God and taken risks, I have grown spiritually in ways I could never have imagined. I invite you to join me for the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Run for Burma on Saturday, March 28. As you run, you may think that the hills on the Cushman trail are tough. In fact, they are.

“But I ask you to remember the hills of Burma—and what it would be like to have to flee your village hut because you are being attacked by the Burmese Army. You grab your kids or a cooking pot or a blanket... and you run for your life. They are lost people seeking a homeland (like the stories of our lost sheep, coin, and sons). One day they will no longer be running. We will share a giant celebration with them in heaven as we all enter an eternal homeland with them. For now, we join the experience of the lost people by running with them.”

What is your story? Can you tell it? Can you tell any of the stories of Jesus? Do you see the hand of God in the ordinary things of your life? We make it WAY harder than we need to...