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Steward

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Lordship

application

Jesus speaks on lordship

youth

NirV Backpack Bible

concept

Understanding lordship

sermons

Experiencing Christ as Lord
Relying on God
Following Jesus

reviews

Escape from Church, Inc.
Growing Your Faith
Jesus the Pastor
Boundaries Face to Face

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Follow me, puppy!

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Imagine a puppy caught in a bear trap. Imagine a stranger coming across the trap and extricating the puppy, setting it gently on the path, and then continuing on the path calling invitingly, "Follow me, puppy."

Whether or not the puppy follows, the stranger is its savior. If the puppy decides to obey and follow the stranger, it has accepted him as master as well. *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be (Jn 12:26).*

Let's say this is a smart puppy and it starts following the kind stranger, instead of fending for itself in the scary world of bear traps. Soon its energy returns and, like a normal puppy, it is enticed by the sights, sounds, and smells of the forest. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way (Is 53:6).* From time to time the new master slows a bit or pauses in his steady journey toward his home to repeat the call "Follow me, puppy."

The easily distracted puppy is becoming attached to this savior and master, but (1) the relationship is not very deep yet, (2) "follow me" is new to the puppy's vocabulary, and (3) obedience is a concept that will take some time and training for it to fully internalize. But as the puppy continues to come back at the master's call, the sense of a following, obedient relationship begins to grow.

In some ways, the relationship of puppy with its savior-turned-master mirrors that of the Christian and his or her Savior and Lord. As the relationship grows, the puppy goes less and less on its own explorations, letting go of its short-sighted agendas for the journey. It focuses more and more on walking with its chosen master, even though it may not understand exactly where they are going or the purpose for the trip. But we are not puppies, and life isn't that simple, is it?

This issue of *Dynamic Steward* explores the topic of human, not canine, response to Lordship. But it has distinct echoes of the scenario above. In it you will discover the concept of drawing closer to the Master, not just trying harder; the concept of following Him, not just doing Him the favor of accepting Him; and the concept of obedience as the natural antidote to discontent. Unlike a puppy, we were created by God to "reason together" (Is1:18). And what more reasonable decision can we make than to be more intentional about following the Master home?

Jesus Speaks on “Lordship”

From the staff of Dynamic Steward

Introduction

What did Jesus have to say about lordship? In this study we will take a look at some personal views of lordship as expressed by Jesus Christ. In other words, how did following Christ as Lord look to Him from His own perspective!

As a group, read Matthew 7:20-27.

Practicing His words

Following Christ as Lord means surrendering to His love, and with self-forgetful compassion, caring for the needs of His children. According to Jesus, both sheep and goats address Him as “Lord,” but only one group showed that He was.

Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” If the “fruit” that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7:20 is not “prophesying in His name or driving out demons and performing many miracles,” then, what is it? How discouraging to have done these “good” things in the name of Jesus, only to hear His words: “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Jesus’ response, “I never knew you” is key to understanding who His disciples really are. They are those who “hear His words and put them into practice”—those who “do the will of the Father in heaven.” Those who are in intimate relationship with Him: “For I know my sheep; and my sheep know me,” He declares. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10).

Read Matthew 25:31-45 together.

Sorting out sheep and goats

On Christ’s authority, saved sheep will be separated from lost goats. The interesting question posed by both groups is, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison...” And the king’s response: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did [or did not do] for one of the least of these, you did for me.”

Following Christ as Lord means surrendering to His love, and with self-forgetful compassion, caring for the needs of His children. According to Jesus, both sheep and goats address Him as “Lord,” but only one group showed that He was.

Read Luke 6:46-49 and John 13:12-17.

The heart speaks

“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart ... for out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks,” says Jesus. “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” “Listen to my words and put them into practice.”

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ ... for that is what I am.... I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.... No servant is greater than his master.... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (Jn 13:13-17).

Discuss together what it means to you to rely upon and follow Christ as Lord.

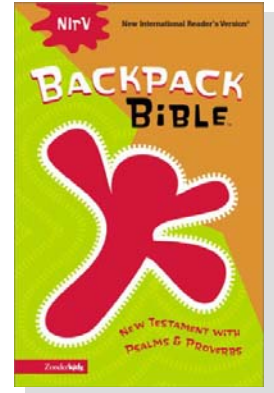


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quotes

Christ as Lord ...

Jesus cannot be our Savior unless he is first our Lord.—*Hugh C. Burr*

Christ is not valued at all unless he be valued above all.—*St. Augustine*

Do you think it was self-denial for the Lord Jesus to come down from heaven to rescue a world. Was it self-denial? No, it was love—love that swallows up everything, and first of all self.—*Nikolaus Ludvig von Zinzendorf to John Wesley*

Every character has an inward spring; let Christ be that spring. Every action has a keynote; let Christ be that note to which your whole life is attuned.—*Henry Drummond*

If Christ comes to rule in the hearts of men, it will be because we take him with us on the tractor, behind the desk, when we are making a sale to a customer, or when we are driving on the road.—*Alexander Nunn*

The religion of Jesus begins with the verb “follow” and ends with the word “go.”—Anonymous



Understanding Lordship

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
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Lordship as foundation

Stewardship is the human side of Lordship. Jesus is Lord and we are His stewards—managing the resources He has placed in our hands. The Lordship paradigm is the foundational concept undergirding all of stewardship. When we accept God as Owner and give Him control, it transforms our entire approach to the way we live each day. Lordship is much more than simple surrender to God. It must be integrated into the very core of our being! Let's explore this paradigm, seeking to find ways to make it our own life perspective.

The apostle Paul presents Jesus Christ as Lord because of who He is and what He has done (Php 2:5-11). Being God, Jesus chose to empty Himself and become a man. Yet becoming human was not enough. He identified Himself with the essence of humanity, taking the form of a servant and dying our death on Calvary. In doing this, Christ identified Himself with our sin to the extent that He became “sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21). As a result, God has exalted Jesus, giving Him a name above all other names. And at the end of time, every tongue will declare Him Lord. So the fact that He is Lord is an eternal reality.

Sooner or later every person will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. But it is not enough to say He is Lord. At the end of the millennium, even the wicked will admit Christ is Lord. It must be a confession of relationship with Him, if it is to transform our lives.

More than obedience

Too often we see Lordship as simple obedience. “God says it, we do it.” While containing an element of truth, this approach ultimately leads to failure and discouragement. The power for obedience is often missing. We try to obey only to fail again and again, attempting to do by human force of will what only God can empower.

At other times we understand Lordship to mean the loss of control. Once again, there is an element of truth here. But it must be much more. It is a surrender that leads to an even more powerful life.

Lordship is intimacy with God. It happens as Christ dwells in us and we integrate that relationship into daily life. It is the result of accepting Christ as Savior, Owner, and present within us, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- As Savior, He forgives and saves us
- As Owner, He controls us
- As present within us, He empowers us

Born for intimacy

Lordship began with creation; Adam and Eve were created for intimacy with God. Adam began life in the cradle of God's arms, awakened by the kiss of life. Discovering God and his own identity in relationship with God were his first conscious thoughts. As humans we are born with the capacity for, as well as the need of, intimacy with the Almighty. And we will never be at peace, never be satisfied, until we find that union with God for which we were created.

Lordship is the realization of that union for which we were born. In our relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord, we discover a level of intimacy where the core of our heart is transformed by the very presence of God. In giving the promise of “another Comforter,” Jesus also promised to return to us (Jn 14:18). When the Comforter came, He brought the assurance of His presence: “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (Jn 14:20). This indwelling presence of Christ is the essential core of the biblical concept of Lordship.

Paul presents the promise “that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ep 3:16-17, ESV). Paul concludes that as a result of knowing the height and depth of God's love, we will be “filled with all the fullness of God” (Ep 3:15-19). This is the scope of the promised intimacy with God—Christ bringing the fullness of God into our lives.

Restoring the natural order

Lordship is also submission. It is realizing that our sinful nature places us in a natural position of rebellion against God—a position where we will create or be our own god. It is recognizing our innate “lostness” and accepting our need for a radically different life which is ours only when we die to self. The act of submission to God restores the natural order in which we were created. It allows God to resume His place on the throne of our life. It places us in the right relationship with God from which we can begin an entirely new life. By our submission we connect with God as the source of strength and power for living the daily life.

Christ invites us into a partnership. As He indwells us (Ep 3:16-17), His Lordship empowers our everyday activities. Accepting Him as Owner, we manage His resources with His guidance and power. Therefore, whatever we do is done to God's honor and glory (1 Cor 10:31). Since it is His business, what is done in the name of that business reflects on Him. We act in the name of the Lord, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17, ESV). Everything we do is done serving Him (Col 3:22-24).

A living relationship

While this relationship offers so very much, it also confronts us with far-reaching demands that are in direct contrast to the contemporary Christianity which has been assimilated by the world around us. This Christianity has lost its power, for it has abandoned its source—the indwelling Christ. Instead of debating about issues of obedience or arguing about how to keep the Sabbath, as Lord, Jesus invites us into something much more radical—a life of intimate union with Him. Each part of that life is transformed by His presence.

Lordship means God says it and I do it. This is not because of my effort to obey. Instead it is the fulfillment of God's promise to work in us "both to will, and to do" (Php 2:13). He is Lord, and you and I have the privilege of living out this experience in every day life. How? By abiding in Him and allowing Him to abide in us. Thus, lordship moves from a theological expression to a living relationship with the King.

Lordship is much more than simple surrender to God. It must be integrated into the very core of our being!

stewardship

window report from SID stewardship director ...



SID Stewardship Seminar Held in Nairobi

It was a great blessing for me to attend the stewardship training conducted in Nairobi on April 18-23, 2004, by Elders Ben Maxson and Jean-Luc Lézeau. Having been recently appointed SID Stewardship Director, this seminar gave me a firm foundation on which to begin my ministry in this area. I was very impressed by the emphasis on salvation and stewardship as the lifestyle of one who accepts Christ's Lordship.

This approach does not neglect tithes and offerings but puts them in their proper perspective. To teach tithes and offerings to a person who has

not experienced the assurance of salvation is putting "the cart before the horse." Once a person has accepted the assurance of salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the process of discipling follows. This process integrates Christ into every area of life, including our finances.

We thank God for this Christ-centered approach to stewardship. All who attended the seminar were truly blessed. By God's grace, we hope to ignite the fire of biblical stewardship throughout our division. Kindly keep us in your prayers.

—Enock Chifamba
SID Stewardship Director

Experiencing Christ as Lord

*Dr. Derek Morris, Senior Pastor
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Jesus understood that you can learn a great deal about people by analyzing the way they use their resources. In fact, he told a parable that addresses this very issue.

Trash analysis

You can learn a great deal about people by studying how they spend their money, their time, and their energy. Read the entries in their checkbook ledger. Review the charges on their monthly charge card statement. Scan through their daily planner. Look at the appointments that are there, and those that are not.

There is even a new science of trash analysis! But make sure you wear thick rubber gloves and put a clothespin on your nose! Trash analysis students take a bag of household trash and do an analysis of the family's lifestyle and spending habits! Any analysis of how we use our resources would reveal that some of us use them more wisely than others.

Jesus understood that you can learn a great deal about people by analyzing the way they use their resources. In fact, he told a parable that addresses this very issue. The parable of the talents is familiar to us, but I believe there is a vital truth embedded in the parable that many of us have not noticed (See Mt 25:14-28).

There are four main characters in the parable: the master and three of his servants. The master plans to travel abroad for some time, so he calls the three servants and entrusts them with his assets. To one he gives five talents, to another he gives two talents, and to a third servant, he gives one talent. With this introduction, there are at least two questions that come to our minds. First, what is a talent?

Drachmas and talents

When I was a young boy, I thought the parable of the talents was telling us that some people are more talented than others! But, as you may know, a talent was an amount of money. The common Greek coin used during the time of Jesus was called a drachma. It was the equivalent of the Roman denarius. A drachma was a day's wages for a laboring man. A talent was 6,000 drachmas. Like the mina, which was worth 100 drachmas, the talent was not a coin, but a monetary weight equal to the weight of 6000 drachmas.

Now, a drachma weighed approximately 3.8 grams of silver. So a talent would weigh about 75 pounds. That's a lot of silver! And that talent was *all* silver. A talent was worth 6000 days' wages, 20 years of wages for a laboring man. That was a considerable amount of money to entrust into anyone's care. And the master entrusts five talents to one servant, 100 years' wages, two talents to another servant, 40 years' wages, and one talent to a third servant, 20 years' wages.

Use of power

This raises a second question in our minds. Why did the master give a varied amount to each servant? Did he like one servant more than another? No. The text tells us the reason. The answer is found in Matthew 25:15. "To each according to his own ability." The Greek word translated as "ability" is more commonly translated as "power." Apparently the master assessed the capability of each servant, and depending on his assessment of their ability, he entrusted to them a portion of his assets.

Let's look at how each one of the three servants responded to the master's trust. Remember. We are looking for an important truth embedded in this parable that is often missed. How does the servant who is entrusted with five talents or 100 years' wages respond? Does he say, "Hallelujah! Let's have a party"? No. Does he settle down for a long winter's nap? The master is not there to look over his shoulder. What does this servant do who has been entrusted with the equivalent of \$2,000,000?

SCRIPTURE:
Matthew 25:14-28

The problem in this situation is not the amount entrusted to the servant's care. The problem goes much deeper than that.

What made the difference

Let's look at Matthew 25:16. "The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more." What does that tell you about this servant? The master had certainly not misjudged his character. Doubling assets doesn't happen overnight. And why was this servant so diligent? It wasn't *his* money! The five talents had been placed in his care by the master. Why was he so diligent in immediately putting those resources to work? It must have had something to do with his relationship with the master.

How does the servant who was entrusted with two talents or 40 years wages respond? "... the one with two talents gained two more" (Mt 25:17). Again, this didn't happen overnight. He didn't go to the gaming table and roll the dice. It took diligence and industriousness to double his master's assets. Why did this servant invest so much of his energy into working with his master's assets? It must have had something to do with his relationship with the master.

Let me explain

What about the third servant? Some people feel sorry for this fellow. After all, he only received one talent. But remember, one talent was equal to 20 years wages! The problem in this situation is not the amount entrusted to the servant's care. It goes much deeper than that. Notice how the third servant responds. "But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money" (Mt 25:18).

Why did he do that? Let's listen to his own explanation. When the master returned from his journey, the servant said: "Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground" (Mt 25:24-25). Why did the servant act the way he did? It had something to do with his relationship with his master. Do you see a pattern emerging here? The way that each servant responds depends upon his relationship with his master!

This parable is not just about three servants back then. It is about us, right here today. And the truth embedded in this parable is still the same. The way you use the resources God has entrusted to you is an indicator of your relationship with Him. The Bible tells us that everything belongs to God. The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it" (Ps 24:1). But He does entrust us with some resources to use wisely.

What are some of these resources? Our earth. Our health. Our minds. Our abilities and natural talents. Our financial resources. Our time. The truth God has revealed to us. These are some resources God has entrusted to us. The way we use His resources is an indicator of our relationship with Him.

Wesleyan strategy

I have always admired the great English preacher, John Wesley. Though I have read his journal and many of his sermons, I did not know much about his stewardship until recently. What I learned confirmed the truth that we have discovered today from God's Word.

When Wesley began his ministry, he earned £30 per year. He lived on £27 and gave away £3 as a tithe. Some years later, he was earning £90 per year, but he still chose to live on £27 and give the rest away.

Toward the close of his ministry John Wesley's income reached £1,400 or the equivalent of about \$160,000 today. He still chose to live simply on £30 per year, and gave the rest away. Wesley's life practice may startle some of us, but I'm sure you would agree—the way he used the resources God entrusted to him was an indicator of his relationship with the Lord.

Lord of all?

Our resources include more than money. If someone were to study your day planner, what conclusion would she come to? What does your use of time tell about your relationship with God? I'm not just talking about Sabbath but *all* of your time. Seven days a week. Twenty-four hours a day.

When Jesus was here, there were four men who used the resources God gave them to bless the life of their friend. They were not physicians or healers, but they had strong arms and legs and determination. They were willing to tear up a roof. They had the creativity to use their belts to lower their friend to the feet of Jesus. The way they used the resources the Lord entrusted to them was an indicator of their relationship with Him.

Don't try harder

Do a careful assessment of how you use the resources the Lord has entrusted to you. Do you recognize that everything you have comes from God? Remember: The way we use these resources is an indicator of our relationship with Him.

If something doesn't look right, don't just try harder. *Draw closer.* Spend time in communion with Jesus. Be attentive to His word. Let Him direct you as you use the resources He has placed in your hands, and your life will be a living demonstration that you are experiencing Jesus Christ as Lord of all.

Relying on God

*Ken Smith, President
President and Founder
Christian Stewardship Ministries*

*Even in the midst of
disappointment, because
things did not go our
way, we can be fulfilled,
knowing that we have
done what God desired.*

Overcoming discontent

Are you discontented? Dissatisfied or unhappy? Or rather, are you fulfilled? To be fulfilled is to be content. What makes us discontented? Usually our lack of fulfillment centers on our circumstances. Poor relationships, a lousy job, stretched finances or low self-esteem can lead to discontent.

We could meet these challenges by identifying them, deciding what needs to change and then establishing action steps to convert discontent into fulfillment. But the Bible offers a somewhat different solution.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:11-13 that overcoming discontent is a matter of relying on God: “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”

But how do we learn to rely on God? It is very simple. Not easy, but simple. All we have to do is find out what He wants us to do in the area where we feel discontent, and then do what He wants.

To find out what God wants, all we have to do is ask Him. All too often, when we remember to ask the Lord, we do not wait for His answer. He may be trying to tell us, but we have already gone on to something else. Or if we do listen, we usually are not willing to do what He says. We have not learned to rely on Him—to really trust Him—for the solution.

The Lord will not solve every challenge the way we would prefer, but if we do what He asks of us, we can be content. Even in the midst of disappointment, because things did not go our way, we can be fulfilled knowing that we have done what God desired. There are three common areas of discontent: relationships, work, and finances. God can bring us peace in each area.

1. Relationships

Problems in our relationships with those closest to us can be the most painful of all. We can be dissatisfied in marriage, discontented with the bond with our children or our parents, and also disappointed in our relationships with friends and colleagues.

Finding fulfillment in relationships means turning first to God, expecting Him to resolve the problems. We must ask for His solution and wait patiently until we hear it. Then comes the hard part—doing what God requires.

Often this is as simple as asking someone for forgiveness. Nine times out of ten, that is all that is needed. The other person will bend a little, and the relationship is restored. It is not a matter of who is at fault. What matters is who will take the initiative in seeking forgiveness.

However, in the most extreme cases, the other person may not be willing to forgive. If we have asked for forgiveness and done all that God has shown us to do, then we must leave the broken relationship with the Lord.

I had to do that with someone who had once been a very close friend. I gravely offended my friend, and the relationship was broken. Soon after I became a Christian, I asked for his forgiveness, but he cursed me instead and has rebuffed my other attempts to reconcile our friendship. Now I must leave this relationship with God.

SCRIPTURE:
Philippians 4:11-13

Of course, we can and should pray about broken relationships—as I do about my lost friend. Yet the results remain with God. And our contentment must rest in knowing we have done everything God wanted us to do.

2. Work situations

A few of us have jobs we would not trade for anything. But many have jobs we are not crazy about. Some have jobs we really want to leave. And a few have jobs we must escape to preserve our sanity.

To find fulfillment in our work, we must rely on God and do what He says. There are five ways God usually works.

God can supernaturally change our attitude toward a job. Or we can find aspects of the job that enable us to feel content even when the job as a whole is not fulfilling. We can find contentment through the job's indirect benefits—things outside the day-to-day work that the job makes possible. We can seek to have the job changed. Or we can change jobs.

However, the key to fulfillment in work remains finding God's path. This may mean taking some risks, relying on God at a deeper level than ever before, and asking questions we often do not want to ask. It could even mean being willing to risk being dismissed or quitting without knowing God's plan for our provision.

Job contentment comes from obedience—staying where we are when God directs us to do that or being ready to move when He calls us to go.

3. Personal finances

Who does not wish they had more to spend, or less to manage? The key to contentment in personal finances is to realize that what we have is not ours, but God's. We are stewards, and we must develop a spending plan—a budget—that recognizes the limitations of our resources and God's priorities for our spending. Then we must commit ourselves to exercising the self-discipline to stay within the plan.

When I became a Christian, I was in debt. I had no budget. I did have great anxiety about my finances. However, I soon discovered the biblical principles of managing money and learned how to apply those principles to my situation. At this point, I no longer struggled with trying to understand what God wanted me to do differently, but whether I was willing to do what He wanted.

I chose to be obedient and trust the Lord with my financial future. I increased my giving. I stopped borrowing and using credit cards. I paid off everything I owed and began to save money. At the same time, my income increased, my spending decreased, and the balance between income and outgo gave me—and when we married, my wife Pat—maximum contentment.

In short, I am convinced that the antidote for discontent is converting areas of disobedience to God into obedience. As we seek His direction and obey His leading, the result will be contentment and fulfillment.

I no longer struggled with trying to understand what God wanted me to do differently, but whether I was willing to do what He wanted.

CSM is a ministry dedicated to assisting Christian individuals, families, ministries, and Christian-owned businesses to achieve their potential in the area of stewardship. Want to know more? Log on to www.csmin.org



Following Jesus

*David VanDenburgh, Senior Pastor
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This abridged sermon, originally entitled, "We Believe Jesus Christ is Lord," was preached on February 17, 2001 at Kettering SDA Church.

The first creed

The briefest and earliest Christian creed was written by the Apostle Paul and is found in 1 Corinthians 12:3. But look quickly, because it goes by very fast. Paul says, "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, 'Let Jesus be cursed.' And no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." This is what Christians said when they accepted Jesus. It was especially significant in those days, because it was dangerous to say. Historians state that soldiers, civil servants, and government officials would meet one another on the streets of the Roman Empire with the greeting "Caesar is lord," and the appropriate response was "the lord is Caesar."

Imagine what would happen if someone said to a Christian, "Caesar is lord," and he responded, "Jesus is Lord." He would be in direct confrontation with the mighty power of Rome! But Christians did that. They understood that being a Christian meant acknowledging Jesus as Lord and that the Lordship of Jesus Christ shapes and colors everything in life.

Many long and comprehensive creeds have been written since then. But I believe Paul's creed is the best. It does not put God in a "box." It calls Christians to faithfulness, recognizing that Jesus is the living Lord of the church and everything about us as Christians is about our relationship with Him.

A comprehensive definition

What is a Christian? Some may say a Christian is one who attends church. Or one who has been baptized. Others describe a Christian as a person who believes or does certain things. But the most comprehensive definition of a Christian is a person who is seriously committed to living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. To put it simply—a Christian is a person who follows Jesus.

Then, what is a Christian church? A Christian church is a group of people who fellowship together because they are engaged in the same business—the business of following Jesus. The purpose of the Church is twofold: First, to follow Jesus, and second, to enlarge the circle of Christ's followers by inviting others to say "yes" to following Him too. If you look at Jesus' life and words, there was no ambiguity in His mind about who He was and what He expected from people. He was not hesitant to call people to submit to His Lordship. Jesus said to His disciples, "You call me Lord and Master, and you say right, for that is what I am" (Jn 13:13).

Not a lot of options

C. S. Lewis once said that Jesus does not leave us a lot of options. It is popular for people to say of Jesus Christ, "He was a great religious leader... He was a great prophet like Mohammed... He was a wise man like Confucius... Or, He was an enlightened one like Buddha." But we only have three choices. Either Jesus was a liar who claimed to be Lord and Master but knew he was not. Or He was a lunatic. Somebody who *thought* He was Lord of the universe, like people in mental institutions who think they are Napoleon or Jesus Christ.

Lewis says, if [Jesus] isn't a liar or a lunatic, then that leaves us only one other choice: He is Lord. Christ Himself says, "I am Lord." And He is very clear about what He wants. He wants people to follow Him—to be His disciples and obey Him. To go where He asks them to go and to do what He wants them to do. This is non-negotiable.

SCRIPTURE:
1 Corinthians 12:3

Jesus' very first words

Jesus' very first words to His church were, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). And those words are the same words He speaks to us now: "Follow me." Jesus told His disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt 10:38). He says, "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt 18:19-22). A scribe once said to Jesus, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go!" (Mt 8:19). And Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes, and birds ... have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. In other words, if you are going to follow me, you had better be ready, for it is not going to be easy.

Scripture tells of a rich young ruler who runs up to Jesus and asks, "What must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus replies: "Sell everything you have, then take up your cross and follow me" (Mt 19). The young man leaves sadly because he has great possessions, and the cost of following Jesus is more than he wants to pay. And then there is Zachaeus. When Jesus sees Zachaeus in the tree he says, "Zachaeus, come down; for I'm going to your house today." Jesus exercised authority! And He calls people to recognize His authority by submitting to His Lordship in their lives.

If I had been approaching Zachaeus, I would not have done it that way. In fact, in similar circumstances we usually say: "I was just wondering. I don't want to inconvenience you. I know you are busy, but would it be possible for Jesus to have a little bit of your time this afternoon? If you could work Him in I would really appreciate it. Whatever is convenient for you!"

Do Jesus a favor?

But Jesus is different. He looks up and says, "Get down here; I'm going to your house today!" Zachaeus had a choice. He could say "no" or "yes" to Christ. And the response he made determined whether he was saved or lost. When Jesus calls us to recognize His Lordship in our lives, He does not really ask our permission. We have this backwards somehow. We picture Him standing in the cold, knocking at our heart's door and the evangelist saying, "Poor Jesus! Look at Him standing out there in the cold snow. Why don't you open your heart and let Him come in? Do Jesus a favor!" But this is not how Jesus presents Himself to us. Instead, He says, "Come down here! I need to be in your house this afternoon." There *is* a difference.

When Christ told His followers He was leaving, He promised to send another like Himself—the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would empower them to live as His followers, teach them the meaning of God's word, and apply it to their lives. That is how they would follow Jesus. And this actually happened.

In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit moved upon the disciples and they began to preach. A crowd ran up and said, "These people are drunk!" But Peter said, "We are not drunk. This is the fulfillment of what was promised in Scripture." In the power of the Spirit, Peter helped the people see how they had sinned by refusing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. And through the Old Testament Scriptures, he revealed that Jesus was Lord. Scripture says they were cut to the heart. They stood before Peter and said, "What have we done? We have crucified the Lord! What hope is there for us?" And Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized and you will be forgiven. And not only that, but God will give you the same Holy Spirit that He has given us."

Everything about us as Christians is about our relationship with Him.

In other words, it was a command to accept the Lordship of Christ. This was the issue of salvation: Would they submit to Christ's Lordship? Those early Christians *did* follow Jesus—boldly and bravely. They had no money or church buildings. They had no seminary training or paid clergy. The culture was hostile, but they put their lives on the line every single day and they followed Jesus.

Put quite simply

It was a simple kind of Christianity. Paul expresses it this way: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rm 10:9). Here is how Paul sums up the preaching of the gospel: "What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4:5). This was the powerful message of the New Testament church. And these people obeyed the voice of the Spirit as He taught them the will of the Lord.

It is fascinating to read Acts and see how directly God through the Holy Spirit led His people. While the Antioch Christians were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Ac 13:2). And they did. They laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and said, "The Spirit has called you, brothers. Go. Follow." And "being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus" (Ac 13:4).

Following Jesus continued

The Acts of the Apostles is really not the *acts* of the apostles, but the acts of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit said do this, and they did it! It said go there, and they went there. And sometimes the Spirit said do *not* go there, and they didn't (Ac 16:6). This is the way it was in the early church.

All turned around

But somewhere along the way Christians began to forget about Jesus Christ being Lord. They began to act as if they were the "lords" of the church and Jesus was their servant. Somehow the purpose of Jesus was not to command His people, but rather to make them healthy, prosperous, and comfortable. To hear their prayers and answer them. To protect them while they traveled, to watch over their children, to get them a good job, a nice house, and bless them. And somehow Christianity became more about Christians than Jesus.

And with this kind of thinking, you begin to hear questions like, "What will I gain if I become Christian? What kind of church do I want to join? What kind of music do I like?" Or "I want a church that offers programs my family wants. I don't like it when the church keeps asking for money. I'm too busy—I don't have time for church work."

These statements reflect the assumption we often make: Jesus is about serving us rather than us serving Him. We tend to forget about following, obeying, and serving Him by serving others.

Over the years, I have had some people come to me and say, "Pastor, I am going to have to give up my ministry to the church."

"Oh, really? Why?"

"Well, because, um, I just got a new job and I am very busy. I don't have time for that ministry anymore. Maybe later, when things settle down a little bit."

I try to be gracious, because I know life can truly be a "stretch." But on the other hand, sometimes I just want to say, "Maybe you should get rid of that job. I mean, maybe you're investing too much time in work if you don't have time to serve God."

What happens when Christ's Lordship gets pushed off to second or third place in our lives? How did it happen that the Church that began with Jesus saying "Follow me! I am your Lord and Master. If you want to follow Me you must give up everything and take up your cross!" How did it happen that we came from there to the place where we look for a church that does not make too many demands on us? Whatever happened to the kind of Christianity that says to people, "Jesus is your Lord and He commands you"?

I was talking with a Christian of another faith a while ago. He asked me about Sabbath and why I go to church on Saturday. After explaining he said, "That sounds great, but it would be very inconvenient for me! I have athletic events on Saturdays and other things I need to do. Stores are not open all the time on Sundays, but they are on Saturdays."

Is convenience the right issue here? Is it a matter of whether it is convenient to follow God or not? Jesus was not shy about this kind of thing. He said "Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say?" (Lk 6:46) Many Christians tend to think they should be rewarded for serving Jesus, as though it were somehow above and beyond the call of duty to respond to human need or to sacrifice for the sake of serving. But that is a far cry from the way Jesus called Christians to live.

No, you first!

Christ says, "Will any of you who has a servant ... when he has come in from the field, say, 'Come at once and sit down at the table'" (Lk 17:7-10). In Jesus' day there were more slaves than citizens, so people knew very well what slavery was about. If you were a slave, you had no life. You were at your master's beckon call. If your master said you worked till eight o'clock, you worked till eight o'clock! If he wanted something at midnight, you got up and took care of it. And that is why when Jesus said, "Which of you, if he has a slave, when he comes in from plowing the field, would say to the slave, 'You must be tired. Here! Let me take your sandals off! Sit down and put your feet up. Dinner will be ready in a little while.'"

When Jesus said that, all of His listeners would have laughed, because it was not that way. Jesus continued, "Would he not rather say to him, 'prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink.' Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have only done our duty.'"

The church is about one thing—following Jesus. Everything else flows from that. We worship because following Jesus is so wonderfully good. We have fellowship with one another because we all follow Him together. We love and care for one another because Jesus commands us to do so. We believe and do certain things and we refuse to do other things because we are following Jesus. When we are baptized, we die to the "self-life" and are reborn to the "Christ-life." We commit ourselves to live for Him, and we begin to follow Him wherever He leads us.

That works, but how does it work? It works by actually living the way Jesus lived. To have Jesus as Lord of my life means that I am committed to doing what He

asks me to do. It means praying like Jesus prayed. Becoming familiar with the words of God like Jesus did. It means spending time alone with God, as Jesus did and obeying the voice of the Spirit. And, it means getting out of the boat and putting your feet on the water, in obedience to the voice of Jesus who calls you to follow Him to impossible places!

Following in hard places

Simon Peter's first encounter with Jesus was when Christ said to him, "Follow me." And he did! Peter walked away from his nets, away from his family, and he walked with Jesus. One night on Lake Galilee Peter was in the boat with the other disciples. They were in a frantic storm, rowing and bailing and praying. But through the gloom they saw someone walking on the water. Thinking it was a ghost, they heard the voice of Jesus say, "It is I. Don't be afraid!" Peter shouted, "If it is you, call me out of the boat to follow you." And Jesus said, "O.K. Come!" So Peter got out of the boat, put his feet on the water, and stood up. He was standing on the water! And Peter began to walk on the water—following Jesus in obedience to His call.

Now, that is a radical kind of following! It is a paradigm for you and me. Jesus does not just call us to follow Him on the beach, where we know how to follow. He calls us to follow Him *on* the water, where we don't know how—where we have to rely on Him completely to make it possible!

Soon after, the time came when Jesus said to His disciples, "I am going to go someplace where you won't be able to follow me." And Peter said, "What do you mean, we won't be able to follow you? I will follow you." But Jesus said, "No, you won't." But Peter argued, "Yes I will! I am ready to die for you!" And Jesus replied, "Really, Peter? I tell you, before the rooster crows to greet the dawn, you will denied me three times." And Peter said, "I will not! I am so committed to following you that not even death could keep me from it." And he really meant it. A footnote to the Scripture says, "And so said they all." But before the morning, they all fled in fear. And Simon denied Jesus—not once or twice, but three times. He felt about as low as a human being could feel.

Conversation on the beach

Fortunately the story does not end there. After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Peter and the other disciples decide to go fishing, and they fish all night long. When day dawns, they see Jesus on the beach preparing breakfast for them, and they sit around the campfire eating. Then Jesus turns to Peter and begins to deal with Peter's failure to follow Him. Three times Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" And Peter affirms his love for Jesus. Then Jesus says, "Follow Me."

Peter takes Jesus quite seriously because he immediately follows Him down the beach. He is truly back in the following business! Then something interesting happens. Something that says a lot about the "following business." Peter turns around and sees John following them. And he looks at Jesus and says, "What about him?"

There is always the temptation to look at other people. It is so easy to get caught up with what *they* are doing to follow Jesus that we give more time and attention to their following than our own. But Jesus says to Peter, "Don't worry about him; you just follow me." In those words, Jesus gives us a rule for the business of following: Yes, we are to follow. Yes, following means living under the

Is convenience the right issue here? Is it a matter of whether it is convenient to follow God or not? Jesus was not shy about this kind of thing. He said "Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say?" (Lk 6:46)

Lordship of Jesus Christ, being radically committed to doing His will, no matter what the cost. But it also means that we are not to worry about what other people are doing. We simply focus on our own following.

A private matter

Because Jesus Christ is Lord of the Church, He will put it all together in a way that will give honor and glory to His name. He will advance His kingdom and accomplish His purposes for the world. So, let each of us personally ask God this very private question:

"Lord, if following You as the Lord of my life is truly a core value for me, something for which I would give my life, then what would that following look like? Is there something that would have to change in my life to follow You? Is there something about how I use my time, or my money, or my influence that would have to change in order to follow You the way you have called me to follow? If there is, then as the Lord of my life, please help me to deal with it right now."



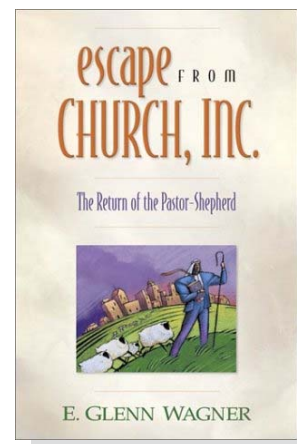
Escape from Church, Inc.

*Reviewed by Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

Wagner challenges the contemporary church with a renewed vision for pastoring in the “shepherd” model of Scripture. The author begins with an analysis of the contemporary church and its structures. He shows the ways in which we have followed the business model and lost the essence of being the church.

Then he analyzes the pastoral calling to be shepherd. He contrasts the leader and shepherd, highlighting the important distinction on the basis of identity. While the shepherd must inevitably lead, the leader can function without shepherding.

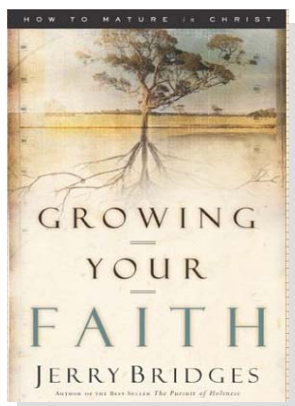
Even though the shepherd model is an agrarian symbol, Wagner shows how it still has contemporary relevance and urgency for today’s church. This is a book well worth reading; especially since it will challenge us to think biblically about our calling.



by E. Glenn Wagner
and Steve Halliday
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2001 US \$12.99

Growing Your Faith

*Reviewed by Benjamin C. Maxon, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*



by Jerry Bridges
NavPress
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2004 US \$12.99

In the style of his classic book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Bridges continues his focus on the life transformed by the presence of God. This book is actually a selection of choice chapters from several different books. He has updated these sections and added new material. He entices the reader into a deeper walk with God and provides practical suggestions for enriching one’s devotional life.

I strongly recommend this book for anyone who is looking for help in finding a more meaningful relationship with God. Bridges is biblical in his approach, as well as an excellent communicator.

Jesus the Pastor

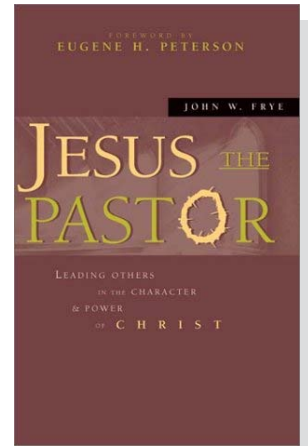
Reviewed by *Claire L. Eva*, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department

In his book, *Jesus the Pastor*, John Frye underscores the life of Christ as the model for Christian pastors. “How seriously do pastors look to Jesus Christ,” says Frye, “as the one who shapes their vision and expression of pastoral ministry?” (p. 17)

For this author and experienced pastor, “Jesus as Mentor” is crucial in the life of the pastor. Frye’s illustration and reference to Jesus saying to him, “John, watch me,” is unforgettable! Christ says to us all “Watch me, see how I do it, and follow me.”

While we agree that all of the Spirit’s gifts are relevant, Frye’s discussion on cessationism seems more polemic and less helpful to the overall thrust of the book. We would affirm, we need to be open to the Spirit’s leading and God’s purposes in bestowing all of His gifts.

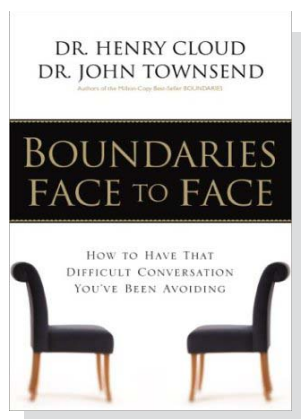
This book makes an invaluable contribution to pastors today! To be effective at all, we need to “lead others in the character and power of Christ.”



by John W. Frye
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2002 US \$10.99

Boundaries Face to Face

Reviewed by *Claire L. Eva*, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department



by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2003 US \$22.99

This work, *Boundaries Face to Face*, was motivated by what prompts any work of importance—need! When Cloud and Townsend found they were continually telling people that they should have a direct conversation with the person they were having a problem with, the response was frequently, “How do I do that—and do it effectively?”

The book is a step-by-step guide to help the reader have this difficult conversation. What makes the volume so meaningful is the authors’ skill and their use of biblical wisdom and personal experiences to speak so appropriately to the issue of effective communication.

Topics include, “Why You Need to Have that Difficult Conversation,” “The Essentials of A Good Conversation,” “Seeing How It’s Done,” “Getting Yourself Ready...,” and finally, actually “Having the Difficult Conversation with People in Your Life.”

This is another important work by Townsend and Cloud that will help the learner express the truth in love and communicate more effectively for a lifetime of growing in Christ.

www.stewardshipoflife.org

The Stewardship of Life Institute, located on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, USA, has a website that we would like to introduce to you: www.stewardshipoflife.org.

The Institute's motto reads: "Living every moment with awareness of God's abundant generosity." A listing of the resources offered on the site include articles from the church press, sermons, study sessions and various academic papers and essays, meditations, prayers, and ideas and programs.

The institute also describes a 12-session study course they offer entitled, "I Have Something that Belongs to You—an Exploration in Stewardship of Life."

editorial

*Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

Do you ever fear God saying to you, "I never knew you"? In reviewing this vital issue of Christ as Lord of your life and mine, it is easy to get caught up in the legalism Luther aptly described as the "oil of our bones." Easy to get into the seemingly inescapable rut that expresses our *self* with words like, "But, Lord, didn't I preach about you? Didn't I work hard for you, trying to do what was right and avoid what was wrong? Why do I feel as if I am on the outside, nose pressed against the pane, looking in? Remember me? Do you know who I am?"

There is hope for us in this paradoxical state. As the hymn says, we are "prone to wander, prone to leave the God I love." How can we reconnect? How can we understand *and* internalize what it means to follow Christ as Lord of our lives?

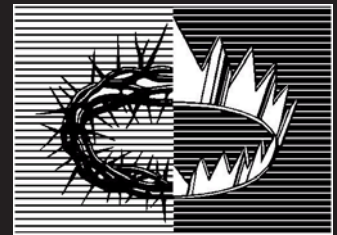
Paul shares his experience. In Philippians 3 and 4 he warns fellow believers to "steer clear of ... religious busybodies" who are only interested in appearances. Then he lists his own impressive credentials and startles us by literally tearing up the list. Further, he says they are worse than trash. Why? "Because of Christ. All the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand" (Php 3:7, 8 MSG).

"I've dumped it all" he says, "*so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him*. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—God's righteousness." I gave it all up "so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner to his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself" (Italics mine, v. 10).

Paul shares the essence of what it means to know and be known of God! He tells us, "I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wonderfully reached out for me.... I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus" (v. 14).

He knows you! And what's more, He is able. "God the Father has his eye on each of you, and has determined by the work of the Spirit to keep you obedient through the sacrifice of Jesus." (IP:1, 2, MSG).

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Exploring partnership with God

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