

The Hidden Treasures of Messiah Jesus

A Ventures for Christ Newsletter

To those hungry Disciples who long to intensify and expand their following of the Savior by taking up their cross.

Issue 11

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Words of Eternal Hidden Wisdom

And the Lord Jesus Himself says, "I will open My mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world" (Matt. 13:34-35).

"Collect for yourselves treasures in heaven," and prove my eternal wealth is Messiah Jesus in my heart (Matt. 6:19-20).

"All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him" (Col. 2:2-3), the Apostle Paul.

"But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19), response of the Virgin Mother.



"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1-3), the Apostle Paul to Timothy.

"Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6), Job after being rebuked by the Lord.

The Declaration of Discipleship in II Timothy 2

Part 2: The Skills of the Cross Disciple

Pastor McCarty

Last month we took an overview through the powerful chapter 2 of II Timothy. I see at least seven life disciplines or discipleship skills in this wonderful passage of Scripture. The Cross Disciple of Jesus keeps at least these seven disciplines in front of him or her. This month I want to show you in greater detail the impact and importance of the first three. Next month we will examine the remaining ones.

#1: I Am a Soldier (v. 4)

A good soldier is prepared to die if necessary. In the movie *Twelve O'clock High*, General Savage (played by Gregory Peck) says you must make up your mind you're going to die. He didn't want anyone with him who thought otherwise! That is the attitude a soldier needs if he is to gain the victory! I was a combat trained pilot during the Cold War. My crew of three would fly our jet bomber to England, load an atomic bomb, study our target in Russia, and be ready in thirty minutes to take off to attack them if hostilities broke out. My last target was 40 miles south of Moscow. We didn't think about dying because the target, our target, was all that mattered to America winning the war. The target in the Christian's life is the cross. The "I" in you dies so that you can follow "Jesus alive" in you and become like Him in seeking the Father's cross target!

In war, the enemy usually sets the time of the fight. Even though there is much a commander can do to prepare, engaging the opposing force never matches the surprises of battle. As Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke wrote more than a century and a half ago, "No

plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first encounter with the main enemy forces." The demonic world bombards you with false information. Another element is what has been called "the fog of war" to describe the confusion, chaos, and carnage of a battlefield. The earth is our spiritual battlefield! From commander to private, the soldier must use the enemies' mistakes (Strategic Misfortunes) and learn from failure, theirs or their enemies', if they are to exploit an unexpected advantage experienced in both the physical or spiritual fight on earth.¹ Ephesians 6:10-20 is Paul's perfect picture of how a soldier of Jesus Christ should operate! You have no chance on your own to succeed against the devil's schemes. Yielding to this teaching is a must for spiritual victory! Results may or may not be seen, but long-range triumph is assured if you are an Ephesians 6 cross warrior!

In WWII the Ploesti Bombing Raid was part of Operation Tidalwave, which took place on August 1, 1943. The raid was a low-level bombing attack on oil refineries in Ploesti, Romania. Two of the recipients of the Medal of Honor from this action lived to see the results of their work but three died and were awarded the medal posthumously. They never saw the difference their bravery made. More crews and planes were lost on that raid

than any other in World War II.² My instructor in flight school was on the Ploesti raid, but I didn't appreciate what he had gone through at that time. I was just out of college, and I didn't know about Ploesti. I do take pride in the fact he taught me to fly! I'll never forget him! Melville Mathews cussed me out every day when I didn't perform perfectly.

Whether a warrior is in the fight or preparing to fight, the primary focus of his or her attention must be on their role as "a fighter to the death." The same is true of the soldier of Christ...the Commander and His causes and His "cross position" for you are always of highest priority, more dangerous, and most risky. This primacy of the warrior's role comes from the Cross Disciple soldier's commitment to carry the Lord's cross as He instructs! He or she can't fight to win without a cross mentality and carrying their cross into battle. The *raison d'être* (reason for being) of the soldier is always being ready to sacrifice and see it as an honor to do so! Every day is a cross day, but too many Christians can't figure it out. We are more concerned about making it easy for "I" in me than yielding to the "Jesus" in me. In the Old Testament system, they sacrificed every day to the Lord, and we copy them by making several cross sacrifices a day to show our sacrificial cross daily.

#2: I Am an Athlete (v. 5)

A champion athlete vigorously prepares to win if possible. At Belmont Park racetrack, on the 4th of June in 1923, Irish horse trainer and sometimes jockey, Frank Hayes, won his first ever steeplechase on a horse named Sweet Kiss. It was also his last act on earth. Hayes suffered a fatal heart attack during the race, and Sweet Kiss, a long shot at odds of 20:1, carried his dead body, still in the saddle, across the finish line winning by a head. It was an improbable win and an unexpected, accidental death, but both horse and rider were prepared, and win they did.

Men set the time for sporting activities, unlike in war where the enemy precipitates the beginning of hostilities whether by direct engagement or indirect political actions. There is a lot of planning required, and contestants are given events, times, and locations. An example of man's rule-setting is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) originally organized in 1906 to make policy, arrange game times, and agree to the rules of play for college athletics.

Teams compete within limits and according to the accepted rules of play. In Arkansas, the Arkansas Activities Association has what is called "The Sportsmanship Rule" for high school and junior high school football games (and other team sports). To hasten the end of the game, this rule comes into play at halftime if one team is 35 or more points ahead of the other; the clock runs all the time in the second half except for touchdowns or timeouts. The object of the rule is to end the game as soon as possible. AAA official, Bobby Swofford, said "Sometimes things don't go your way. Maybe you didn't have the proper game plan. Maybe the [opposing] team's better than you are, but we don't want to sit there and dwell on it."³ Many active church members have never had a cross relationship with Jesus and know their faith is a secondary thing. They sit through their days dwelling on their weak Christian lives and know nothing of Jesus' power exploding within them if they yielded to Him, His cross, and His will. Every Christian can know and experience the promise in Isaiah 40:25-31. All true followers of Messiah Jesus have the Holy Spirit, but not all have experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit. The experience will be a life changer. Make sure you know the difference if you have an earnest hope to glorify the Savior!

As anyone who follows sports knows, successful outcomes can be infrequent. On any given day even the best team or player in a sport can lose and the worst may possibly win. There are incredible winning streaks, but even they will be broken. An example of such a streak, the longest in NCAA Division 1 history, was the Oklahoma Sooners football team with 47 consecutive wins between 1953 and 1957. In the 2024 season they lost one more game than they won (6/7). No athlete or team wins all the time. The immature Christian loses many contests to the demonic world, spirits of darkness in their lives, and authorities of evil. The athletes of the cross are masters of Ephesians 6:10-20 and will stand against all spiritual forces of evil!

#3: I Am a Farmer (v. 6)

A farmer suffers to reap when and what he plants. Farming is hard: “Regarding small farm survival, analysts at USDA’s Economic Research Service, report that small farms, like all small businesses, have a relatively high exit rate of 9 – 10% per year....” Anyone who farms or gardens knows that you plant to reap if blessed. So much of what happens to your plants and animals and the market for what you grow and tend is beyond your control.⁴

God sets the time, and the wise farmer is one who knows how to obey, to work, to wait, to pray, to cultivate, to prune, to feed, to plant, and to harvest. The faithful farmer always reaps and eats if he trusts God.

Farming is labor intensive, even with modern equipment. Your farm dictates how you spend your time, if you want to succeed that is, rather than you farming when you want to. Animals have to be fed and watered, and, in the case of dairy animals, milked. Plants must be watered and fed as well. And the crop must be picked when it is ripe, or all your effort goes to waste. Cross farmers must see other people as a crop to be spiritually reaped for the kingdom. People are a lot like plants, and we Christians should be spiritual farmers. Jesus was clear about this in Matthew 9:36-38. Please memorize these verses: “The Savior saw the vast crowds and was deeply filled with compassion.... They seemed helpless.... So, He turned to His disciples and said...” (HDM). Spiritual farmers are always ready to respond.

Results are not quick, even when the crop grows fast and well. You can be sure something will break down at the most inopportune moment or something else will interfere with a quick end to the process, like the weather. But the results of farming feed both our bodies and our souls and are indispensable to civilized living. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other” (the Lord Jesus in John 15:16-17, New International Version). Love is never wasted. God is love!

Notes:

¹ The no plan quote is attributed to Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, 1871. <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2021/05/04/no-plan/>
The concept of fog of battle was introduced by “Prussian military analyst Carl von Clausewitz in his posthumously published book, *Vom Kriege* (1832),” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fog_of_war

Strategic Misfortune was addressed in Military Strategy Magazine in “An Introduction to Strategic Misfortunes” by A E Stahl, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/An-Introduction-to-Strategic-Misfortunes/>

² Medal of Honor winners, Ploesti raid: **Lt. Col. Addison E. Baker**; **Maj. John L. Jerstad**; **2nd Lt. Lloyd H. Hughes** received the medal posthumously; **Col. Leon William Johnson** and **Col. John “Killer” Kane** survived and received the medal for their leadership in the raid. <https://mohmuseum.org/ploesti/#:~:text=Leon%20Johnson%2C%20commander%20of%20the,Hughes%20refused%20to%20pull%20away.>

³ Frank Hayes: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Hayes_\(jockey\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Hayes_(jockey)); NCAA: <https://www.ncaa.org/>; Quote from Sportsmanship rule: <https://www.thv11.com/article/news/local/how-mercy-rule-works-sports-arkansas/91-9a41c858-dacf-4ff8-a4d7-851a474dcb57>

Winning streak: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longest_NCAA_Division_I_football_winning_streaks; <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/oklahoma/2024-schedule.html>

⁴ How hard is farming quote: <http://www.beginfarmingohio.org/> from <https://fantasticfarm.org/beginner-farmer-beware-just-how-hard-is-farming-anyway/>



Lent and the Call to Follow Jesus

Michael Floyd, Editor

Lent has arrived. Last month as Lent started, we looked at some reasons that observing Lent can draw us closer into our walk with Jesus and understanding our need for Him. This month, I want to focus on the question of “why”? Why did Jesus come to die? One of the best devotionals I have read on this subject is *Fifty Reasons Jesus Came to Die* by John Piper.¹ It takes the reader beyond the standard (but true) answer that “Jesus came to die for our sins so we could go to heaven.” In this article, I want to explore some of those reasons. Jesus came:

To Reconcile Us to God

We often talk about this reason. Since the fall, humanity has lived separated from God and under His judgment. Reconciliation is a relational term. In Scripture, reconciliation refers to the restoration of a broken relationship, particularly between God and humanity due to sin. The term conveys the idea of making peace and bringing two parties back into harmony. Reconciliation is a two-way concept. When two people are at odds, each must be reconciled to the other.

It's the same with humanity and God. As Piper writes, "Our attitude toward God must be changed from defiance to faith. And God's attitude to us must be changed from wrath to mercy."² One might think that we change our attitude toward God when we come to faith. In reality, *God* changes our attitude toward Him. He also, because of the death of Christ, moves from an attitude toward us of wrath to one of mercy. So, reconciliation is accomplished solely by the Lord.

If that's so, you may ask, why does Paul exhort the Corinthians to "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). In context, the verse means *live from that place of reconciliation that God accomplished*. Notice that in verse 17 Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here." In becoming a new creation, we live in an "already/not yet" place—the fact of reconciliation has been accomplished, we are called to live it out.

To Make His Cross the Ground of All Our Boasting

In defending his teaching of "by faith alone," the apostle Paul told the Galatians, "May I never boast *except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14, emphasis added). In his book, Piper points out that all other boasting (that the Bible talks about)

should still be a boasting in the cross. If we boast in the hope of glory, that very boast should be a boast in the cross of Christ. If we boast in the people of Christ, that very boasting should be a boasting in the cross. Boasting only in the cross means only the cross enables every other legitimate boast, and every legitimate boast should therefore honor the cross.³

So, there *are* legitimate boasts—things we are told to boast in.⁴ But all of them are to be grounded in the cross itself, since without the cross, none of them would be possible.

To Show That the Worst Evil is Meant by God for Good

One of the hardest things to wrestle with as believers is the so-called "problem of evil." Why does God allow evil to exist? Why does evil seem to run rampant? As Piper points out, the answers to those questions are ultimately a mystery. Scripture only gives us partial answers to *why* evil exists (those answers center on Satan and the fall, and the sovereignty of God). There is, one thing, however, that we can say for certain: "[I]n Jesus Christ, God entered into it and turned it for good."⁵

Indeed, God promises that *all* things work together for good (Rom. 8:28). That doesn't, of course, mean that "evil" things are turned into "good" things. What it means is that God works in such a way to bring good (as He defines it) out of the "evil" things. As we consider the cross, Jesus' death, the fallen world, and our own "death to self," we must always keep in mind the sovereignty of God. Or, as a Christian artist puts it so well,

*[O]h death, where is your sting?
'Cause I have a God who knows
Who sits and weeps with me
And I have a steady hope
That all will be redeemed⁶*

To Call Us to Follow His Example of Lowliness and Costly Love

The first command Jesus gave to His disciples was, "Follow Me" (Matt. 4:19; 8:22; 9:9). We are called to "take up [our] cross and follow [Him]" (Matt. 16:24). Once a person becomes a follower of His, Jesus *continues* to

give that command. A decision to follow Jesus isn't a one-time event but a day-by-day commitment. We are to not only "follow Him," but we are to walk in the examples He gave us.

One of the clearest examples Jesus gave us is the *attitude of lowliness*. In calling the Philippians to "walk worthy of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27), Paul proceeds to show how that looks. He tells them (and us) about the example of Jesus:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:5–8)

How are we to follow Jesus? *In humility and lowliness*. Elsewhere, Paul tells us, "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position" (Rom. 12:16). That is what Jesus did, and we are to reflect and image His character as we are transformed. He was literally called a friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19). We are to be no less.

To Create a People Passionate for Good Works

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11–14, *English Standard Version*)

In teaching us that God's grace trains the believer to renounce ungodliness, Paul is quick to point out that God's grace has a specific positive purpose—to create a people who are passionate (zealous) for good works. Paul and the other New Testament writers consistently point out that genuine faith always leads to transformation, and part of that transformation is doing good. In doing "good works," we are not attempting to earn our salvation, but rather *living from our salvation*. This is why Jesus said, "[L]et your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

Lent is summed up well in the following quote and poem:

*Lent, in a way, is an annual series of questions that comes up on the soul: Do you really wish to claim this Christ and his way? Is this truly what you believe about the world? And are you now ready to imagine what bearing this Christ-life into the world looks like now?*⁷

To Keep a True Lent

*Is this a fast, to keep
The larder lean?
And clean
From fat of veals and sheep?*

*Is it to quit the dish
Of flesh, yet still
To fill
The platter high with fish ?*

*Is it to fast an hour,
Or ragg'd to go,
Or show
A downcast look and sour?*

*No; 'tis a fast to dole
Thy sheaf of wheat,
And meat,
Unto the hungry soul.*

*It is to fast from strife,
From old debate
And hate;
To circumcise thy life.*

*To show a heart grief-rent ;
To starve thy sin,
Not bin;
And that's to keep thy Lent.*⁸

Notes:

¹ John Piper, *Fifty Reasons Jesus Came to Die*, (Crossway, 2006).

² Piper, 60.

³ Piper, 84.

⁴ Some of the other things we are told to boast in from Scripture include: the glory of God (Rom. 5:2), our tribulations (Rom. 5:3), our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9), and the people of Christ (1 Thess. 2:19).

⁵ Piper, 118.

⁶ Caroline Cobb, "Death You Terrible Thing," words and music by Caroline Cobb Smith. Copyright 2022 Sing the Story Music (ASCAP), admin by Integrated Music Rights. <https://www.carolinecobb.com/songs/death-you-terrible-thing>.

⁷ Joel Littlepage, "Pray and Work for a New World", *Daily Prayer Project*, vol. 7, num. 3, p. 9. Available at <https://www.dailyprayerproject.com/editions/current>.

⁸ Robert Herrick (1591-1674) was an English lyric poet and Anglican cleric. This work was written in 1648, and part of the work *Hesperides: Or, The Works Both Humane and Divine*. See Isa. 58 for some of the ideas behind this poem.



Pastor's Reading List

Starting this month, we'll continue to periodically give recommendations of books that Pastor McCarty thinks are especially helpful.

Secrets of the Secret Place by Bob Sorge

Bob Sorge's *Secrets of the Secret Place* is a compelling guide for anyone seeking to revitalize their prayer life. Sorge doesn't just offer abstract theological concepts; he delivers practical, actionable advice that resonates with the everyday struggles of maintaining a consistent devotional practice. The book's strength lies in its accessibility; the short, digestible chapters make it easy to incorporate into a busy schedule, and Sorge's writing style is both engaging and encouraging.

One of the most valuable aspects of this book is its focus on the "secret place"—that intimate space where one connects with God. Sorge effectively dismantles the notion that prayer is a rote activity, instead portraying it as a dynamic, personal encounter. He provides insightful strategies for overcoming common obstacles, like distractions and feelings of inadequacy, offering tools to deepen one's connection with Jesus. The book's emphasis on cultivating a fervent and meaningful relationship is truly inspiring.

Sorge's insights are grounded in biblical principles, providing a solid foundation for his teachings. He avoids overly complex theological jargon, making the book approachable for readers at various stages of their spiritual journey. *Secrets of the Secret Place* is more than just a book about prayer; it's a guide to fostering a deeper, more intimate relationship with God, and it offers practical wisdom that will undoubtedly enrich your spiritual life.

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