

This is the fifth week of a series
we're calling Next Steps'

We have said that Discipleship
is about following Jesus
Discipleship adds value to our lives.

It's a journey and every journey
is made up of steps

And that's what this series is all about
The simple steps of discipleship.

These steps will help
Change and transform our lives

The steps we are talking about
are not obligations.

As soon as you look at them
as some sort of obligation,
you weaken their potential effectiveness.

These are aimed at simplifying
not complicating your life.

So today we are talking about
what is probably the most difficult step
for most people to take.

"T" - is about tithing and giving.

And yet, because it is so challenging,
it can **have** the most powerful effect on your faith.
And one other thing about this step:
it supports a character trait, most all of us
want to possess.

To look at this step we are going to look at
the passage from Mark's Gospel,
where we read:

*17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up
and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher,
what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Mark 10.17

This story appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

We know from those other accounts that this man was young, rich, and a man of influence and authority.

So this very successful guy comes up to Jesus respectfully and humbly, he even kneels before him.

He asks the question, that is one of the most important questions of all,

what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Mark 10.17

Despite everything going on for him, despite his success,

he knows there is more to life.

He's coming to Christ looking for more.

He asks about

eternal life?

Mark 10.17

Just to be clear,

you can't do anything to get to heaven

that is pure gift that God's mercy provides.

But this guy isn't talking only about

the life of heaven

but, more broadly,

the fullness of life God wants for us right now,

and all the time... So, Jesus answered him,

¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'"

Mark 10.19

Live according to the commandments

and you will be living life as God intends,

simple enough.

He replied and said to him,

²⁰...*“Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.”*

Mark 10.20

In other words,

I have done everything that is required
and my heart is telling me
there is more for me to do.

Besides the basics,
which apply to all of us,
there are challenges that each of us
must face individually.

Yours will be different than mine.

Mine will be different than yours.

So he’s rightly sensing there is more for him
to do...this is what Mark tells us...

²¹*Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said,*

Mark 10.21

But before Jesus answers,
he extends to him...his love.
He is answering in love,
what he says he says because he loves him.

He looks at him with love. And then he said,

...“You lack one thing;...”

Mark 10.21

Put yourself in the rich young man's position.
You have the opportunity to get counsel
and advice from someone you highly respect,
whose counsel you sought.

And after that person hears you out
they come to the conclusion
they have identified
the most essential step you can take
in order to improve,
in order to get to the next level.

You'd probably pay close attention.
So, that is what's going on here.
Jesus identifies the ONE thing
that is keeping him from the full
and successful life that God wants him to have.

And we know from other places
in the Gospel Jesus cites
this exact same problem,
as the number one problem for most people.
Not necessarily for everyone,
but for most people.
It is God's number one competitor
for the human heart.

Here's what he tells this guy:

*...go, sell what you own, and give the money to the
poor,*

and you will have treasure in heaven; then come,

follow me."

Mark 10.21

I am guessing that the guy
didn't hear much beyond:

go, sell what you own..."

Mark 10.21

He didn't hear, what followed that
because Mark tell us,

*²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away
grieving,*

for he had many possessions.

Mark 10.22

If you think about it,
this was an incredible offer
Jesus was offering him
a place in his inner circle,
to become one of his closest disciples.
At different times thousands of people
followed him,

But only 12 were on his immediate staff.

Two thousand years later

we know the names of those people.

People name their kids after them.

We name churches after them:

Peter, Andrew, James and John.

The rich young man could have joined

that group, but as it turns out from his decision,

we don't even know his name.

And don't miss the other value

This offer held,

an even longer term benefit.

you will have treasure in heaven;

Mark 10.21

God actually doesn't just call him

to give his money away

because it's a civic minded,

or altruistic thing to do.

Instead he promises him rewards.

He's talking about an investment.

But the young man walks away from Jesus
and returns to his possessions.

Notice, however, he's not very happy about it. He
doesn't go back thinking
how glad he is that he chose his money
and possessions over Jesus. Instead, we hear he...

went away grieving,

Mark 10.22

He leaves sad
because he already knows,
that his money and possessions
could not satisfy the deepest longings of his heart.

And yet he couldn't release his grip.

And who could blame him?

Would any of us acted differently?

Money is security and we all want security
for ourselves and our families.

Money is comfort
and we all yearn for comfort.

Money is power and influence and prestige
all quite desirable things.

Money is pleasure
Which human nature is designed to seek.

And beyond everything that money is

There's all the stuff that money buys:

Football tickets and HD TVs,

New kitchens and granite countertops

clothes and cars, Ocean City and Disney World,

Dining out, dressing up.

All of which we like and love
And none of which satisfies
the deepest desires of our heart.

Don't get me wrong, money
and the stuff money buys
is not a problem,
unless and until it is a problem,
unless and until our money
and our stuff starts getting
in the way of a meaningful life.

This is why after the rich young man walks away
we are told,

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,

"How hard it will be for those who have wealth to

enter the kingdom of God!" Mark 10.23

That is, for sure, an eye-brow
raising remark for us to hear.

But for the apostles,
it was an absolutely astonishing remark
because their faith,
not just their culture
but their faith taught them
that wealth was a sign of God's favor.

Wealthy people were thought to be closer to God,
in a sense, holier.

So then they asked,

*²⁶ "Then who can be saved?"²⁷ Jesus looked at them
and said,*

*"For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God
all things are possible."*

Mark 10.26, 27

Wealth and possessions,
are nothing to apologize for,
they are blessings from God.

But see, that is exactly it.

God has got to be in the equation.

- Without God it is impossible to see money and possessions in the right way.
- Without God, money becomes the scorecard, the standard, the goal, the aim, the end.
- Without God, and what God says about money. We'll look to money to provide meaning and value to our lives and ultimately to save our lives.
- Without God, it is impossible.

Money is so powerful
that it **can actually take God's place**
in our minds and hearts.

The temptation actually becomes
assigning to money the properties
and powers of God himself.

We're never going to get discipleship right. We're

never going to get life right
Unless and until we get the money part right.
We've got to grow to see that our money
and possessions as gifts from God
and then we've got to learn
to love AND trust the GIVER
of those gifts more than the gifts themselves.

And there is only one way to do that: **give**.
This is why tithing and giving
is a critical step in discipleship.

Intentionally giving to God,
by intentionally giving to the church
or giving to the poor
as a worship gift to God teaches us that our hope
and our happiness and our meaning
and our ultimate fulfillment rest in him.

We say it this way:

I want to *make my giving planned*
not just throwing spare cash
in the collection basket,
we call it "tipping God"
or giving to the poor out of guilt
but planned giving
that is part of my budget,
make my giving a priority,
my gift to God comes first, right off the top

I want to share a true story of my father inviting my brother and I to give when we were small. We sold vegetables from his garden door to door. Each week we would take our wagon and visit our neighbourhood selling vegetables and fruit. One time when I was about 7 years old and my brother 9 he asked us how much we were going to give to God and Church on Sunday. Jim and I looked at each other... not knowing what to say. My father said how much did you make. We had

each made 5 bucks... so he said you should each put in \$2.50. As a seven year old I thought to myself 250... what. Boys be generous to God and God will be generous to you. My father had no idea that tithing was 10% not 50% but we both gave the \$2.50. From a young age our father taught us the importance of giving and even today I always think... How Much Should I Give, and I have learnt that when I am generous to God... God always blesses me.

Giving to God, by giving in my place of worship
as an act of worship
and giving to the poor
is a sure and certain way
to grow my faith right now
as well as make an investment
in your future by building up treasure in heaven.

Discipleship is simply following the Lord,

step by step,
on the path of greatness.
Its following the Lord step by step...
In the direction of discipleship.
A little bit more today than yesterday
A little bit more tomorrow than today
And in the process discovering
a more successful a greater way to live.