

## The Jesus Way of Life

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Rich Nathan

October 5 & 6, 2019

Transforming Power for Your Life

Acts 9:32-45

### Slide

The Jesus way of life and teaching

It occurred to me recently that I've spent nearly my entire life either in school learning or outside of school teaching. I was in school from age three to age 24. From nursery school and Kindergarten to elementary school, junior high, high school, college and law school. And then two years after law school, I began teaching at Ohio State. All the while, I was teaching at church. And when I left Ohio State, I've spent the last 33 years teaching the scriptures here at Vineyard Columbus. All in all, I've spent 58 of the last 60 years learning and teaching.

Now, we typically have a way of teaching adults in the modern world

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How adults are taught in the modern world

As adults, we typically are taught through reading – whether we're reading a book or an article – or we sit through a lecture. Sometimes we take an online class or watch a YouTube video or listen to a podcast. Typically, the way most of us learn as adults is by either reading something or listening to something or maybe watching something.

The way we teach adults in the modern world is very different than the way adults were taught in the ancient world.

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How adults were taught in the ancient world

In the ancient world, adults were not taught by handing them a book. There were very few books since all writing was by hand and it needed to be copied. Any kind of book or scroll was extremely expensive and the average person had no written materials in their home. Of course, there was no online learning, no podcasts, no YouTube. And adults generally didn't learn by sitting in a lecture hall.

Instead, in the ancient world, learning took place through a personal relationship. A student would attach themselves to a teacher who they would live with and imitate their life. They wouldn't just listen to that teacher teach and take notes. They would

follow that teacher or philosopher around and they would imitate the way they did life. This was true for the ancient Greeks and this was true for the ancient Jews.

There's a famous story about a man named Rabbi Akiba. He was so committed to follow his teacher around and learn his teacher's habits that he actually followed his teacher into the privy – you know, into the ancient bathroom. He was asked many years later, "How could you be so disrespectful to your teacher?" And Rabbi Akiba responded, "Actually, I learned three great habits by following my rabbi into the bathroom." We're not told what those three habits are and I'd appreciate it if you didn't try to guess.

Of course, the ultimate illustration of the ancient way of teaching adults was found in Jesus. He didn't just stand in a classroom and speak and ask his followers to take notes. He didn't hand his disciples a book and say, "Read this and give me a book report next week." Rather, he trained his disciples to be like himself. Saying,

Slide Matthew 10:24-25a

<sup>24</sup> "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters.

Like other great teachers in the ancient world, Jesus called his disciples into intimate relationship with himself and then he sought to reproduce in them his own life and his own ministry. The early Christians were called "followers of the Way". They were living out the way of life that was modeled by them and taught to them by Jesus.

You see, the point to all of God's activity in the life of a Christian is to make that Christian look more like his Son, Jesus. The Bible says in Romans 8:29 that's where everything is aimed at in your life if you become a Christian. God is working in your life so that, in the words of the Apostle Paul,

Slide Romans 8:29

[You would be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Paul says that was his goal as a pastor. He writes in

Slide Galatians 4:19

<sup>19</sup> My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

In other words, Paul's goal as a pastor was to see people live like Jesus. That's the question that we should always be asking ourselves if we are followers of the way of Jesus. If Jesus was living in your skin, would he be seeking revenge against an ex-spouse? Would every unkind and irritating statement and action by your ex-spouse

demand that you return the same? How would Jesus respond to hurts from a boss or a co-worker or another church member? Would he return tit for tat? Would he say, “An eye for an eye. That’s the way I taught you to live – to get on social media and blast someone you’re mad at.”?

To be a Christian means to follow in the way of Jesus, to live as Jesus would if he were in your skin. But, you know, the early Christians understood from Jesus that they were not only to imitate Jesus’ ethics – in other words, his honesty, his kindness to others, his servanthood, his forgiveness and his generosity. Early Christians understood that they were also supposed to do what Jesus did. They were to continue his ministry in the world.

Here’s what we read in Mark:

Slide Mark 3:14-15

<sup>14</sup> He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and to have authority to drive out demons.

Jesus was a great ancient teacher. As I said, he didn’t just stand up in a lecture hall and lecture to students while they took notes. He formed a personal relationship with his followers and then he sought to have his followers do what he did. He wanted to reproduce his ministry and methods in their lives.

We’ve been doing a series here at Vineyard Columbus over the last several weeks, in which we’ve been talking about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. What happens when the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – what happens when the Holy Spirit enters our lives?

I want to suggest to you today that the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives is designed to reproduce the Jesus way of life in your life. I’ve called today’s talk, “The Jesus Way of Life”. Let’s pray.

Last week, Eric taught on spiritual gifts – those extraordinary power tools that God gives to the church to build up the church and spread his kingdom in the world.

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The Jesus way of life and spiritual gifts

I want to read to you one of the spiritual gifts texts in scripture. There are actually four spiritual gifts texts in the New Testament. You could jot these references down. There’s one first of all in Romans 12. Second in Ephesians 4. The third is found in 1 Peter 4. And we’re going to look at a fourth text from 1 Corinthians 12. Here’s what we read:

Slide 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

<sup>7</sup> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Now, Eric spoke about this last week, but I want to underline something from his talk. When we look at these nine spiritual gifts, they seem to be very different than the spiritual gifts that we find in a passage like Romans 12. The Romans 12 gifts seem to be more permanent, residing in the individual. The Romans 12 gifts seem to be much more subject to a person's will or control.

So, for example, in Romans 12, Paul says if your gift is serving, you should serve. If your gift is teaching, make sure you teach. If it's encouraging, be an encourager. If your gift is giving, give. If it's leadership, govern diligently. But the 1 Corinthians 12 gifts seem to be, as I said, very different than these. They seem to be less subject to our control, less subject to our will and more subject to the will of the Holy Spirit. And we see this in 1 Corinthians 12:11.

Slide 1 Corinthians 12:11

<sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

So, as Eric pointed out last week, John Wimber came up with the term "situational" to describe 1 Corinthians 12 gifts. And I think that's an extremely helpful way to think about the gifts we have listed here. Here's the deal. As a follower of the way of Jesus, you don't have all the spiritual gifts you will ever have. I know some churches teach that, but it's very apparent from what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 and in 1 Corinthians 14 that you can ask God for gifts that you have never experienced before.

So, for example, here's what we read in

Slide 1 Corinthians 14:1

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.

Later on, he says this in

Slide 1 Corinthians 14:13

<sup>13</sup> For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say.

So, it's evident that we can pray for additional gifts that we don't presently practice, gifts that we've never experienced and gifts that we don't think we can do. God gives these gifts as the situation demands.

Let me explain what I mean. Let's say you encounter a sick person in your family or in the church or in your small group or at work. A static view of spiritual gifts would cause you to say, "Well, I have never personally healed a sick person. We need to look for somebody who has the gift of healing. That's not me. I'm gifted in teaching or music or in serving. My strongest gift is binge watching Netflix. I'm really good at that." The static view of spiritual gifts would say to look around for the person who has the gift of healing.

1 Corinthians 12 has a more dynamic view of spiritual gifts. John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, called this a situational view of spiritual gifts. The situation demands that this sick person be prayed for and the Holy Spirit looks at you and says, "Tag! You're it." The Holy Spirit distributes the spiritual gift to meet the need in the moment. You don't *have* this gift. The Spirit *gives* you the gift in the moment in a dynamic way to meet the need.

John Wimber used to describe this as a plumber going to a job and his toolbox is empty. There's a leaky faucet. I need a wrench and when I look in my toolbox, there are no tools. So, we pray the famous prayer, "Oh God, Oh God, help!" And in the moment, in the situation, God gives us a wrench. We fix the leaky faucet. But God doesn't let us keep the wrench. We go to another leak and we find that there's nothing in our toolbox. The wrench is owned and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Do you get it?

I needed to hear John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, on this over and over again before I finally got it. This view of situational gifting, dynamic gifting, gifting to meet a need in the moment, changed my life. Before I heard John's explanation of spiritual gifts, I always had a static view of gifts. I looked at myself and said, "Well, I've never been used to heal a sick person. I don't have the spiritual gift of healing. I've never given a prophetic word. I don't have the gift of prophecy." But, listening to Wimber and praying over 1 Corinthians 12 over and over again, the penny suddenly dropped. The lightbulb went on. I thought, "My goodness, God could actually use someone like me to do things that I've never done before."

And God can use someone like you to exercise these spiritual gifts even though you have never done so before. Friend, when you expand your expectation for the way God will use you, it changes your life forever. It's like living in a cramped dormitory room and you say, "That's the amount of space that I guess I get to occupy in life." And you move from a cramped dorm room to an 8,000 square foot mansion. I can't believe how much room there is! How expansive my possibilities are!

Let me ask you a few personal questions. I'm speaking now to followers of Jesus. I know that not everyone here is a follower of the way of Jesus, but I'm speaking to those of you who are. Do you personally pray for spiritual gifts that you have never experienced? I'm not asking did you pray this way five years ago or a year ago. I'm asking if you on a regular basis do you say, "Lord, I would like to be used to heal a sick person or to work a miracle or to deliver a prophetic word"? Do you pray that way on a regular basis? Do you expect God to use you when there's a need? We're all waiting on God in our small group. We're waiting to hear his voice. Do you expect that God might use you to give you a message or vision or scripture to be an encouragement to the people in your group?

Since we don't have gifts in this dynamic situation, we can grow and be trained in how to receive and how to use spiritual gifts – these tools that God might put in our hands – as the situation requires. Now, listen, the church is the Body of Christ. The early church operated on the assumption that Jesus of Nazareth was still actively working in the world even though he ascended to heaven. And the way that Jesus continued to work in the world was by his Holy Spirit. The early church operated with the conviction that Jesus continued his work in the world through us.

Here's what the Apostle Paul writes

Slide 1 Corinthians 15:10

<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

That's why when somebody gets healed after we pray for them and they try to thank us, a follower of Jesus immediately responds, "Hey, I didn't do that! If you were healed, if you feel better that's Jesus working here. Not me. I can't heal anybody."

Because the church is the Body of Christ, some people have organized these spiritual gifts into the categories of Jesus' mind, Jesus' mouth and Jesus' hands. Concerning Jesus' mind

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Jesus' mind

- The gift of wisdom
- The gift of knowledge
- The gift of discerning of spirits

Jesus' mouth

- Tongues
- Interpretation of tongues
- Prophecy

## Jesus' hands

- Healing
- Miracles
- Faith

Faith, by the way, is the one that doesn't fit great into any classification scheme. But if a church is filled with the Spirit of Jesus – we operate with his mind, his mouth, his hands. And since we are called to imitate Jesus, then we can learn from him. How did he exercise spiritual gifts? That's what we ought to do. What changes the way that you and I read the gospels?

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The Jesus way of life and the gospels

So often, when followers of Jesus read the gospels they say to themselves, "Yeah, I believe that Jesus healed this sick person or worked a miracle. It's a wonderful thing that happened in history 2,000 years ago." They might even say, "Oh, that healing, that miracle proves that Jesus is special, he's unique. Maybe this proves that he is God." But when you get hold of the idea that the Spirit of Jesus himself is at work in the church and in your life as an individual and that the same Jesus that healed the sick 2,000 year ago is still at work today through his body, through you to do the same thing, then the gospels are not just of historical interest, the gospels become a kind of training manual. The gospels become a kind of YouTube video on how to do something.

Have you ever watched one of those YouTube videos on how to change the turning light in your Honda or your particular car? Your turning signal bulb burned out and you want to change it without taking it to the shop. You're not exactly sure how to get at the bulb. So, you watch a YouTube video and say, "Oh, I just unscrew this panel, then stick my hand in there and turn the bulb one turn to the left and I get the bulb out." Or you watch a YouTube video on the best way to build a small garden wall for your garden or the best way to fry chicken.

How many of you ever read the gospels this way? Like watching a YouTube; how to do something video. I'm going to go to the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – and when Jesus demonstrates the way to do something, as an adult learner I'm going to imitate him and do what he did. That's what it means to be a follower of the way of Jesus. I'm supposed to do what Jesus did, not by trying harder or thinking positively, by relying on the fact that the Holy Spirit is bringing the presence and power of Jesus to bear in this situation.

Let me show you how this works. One of the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 is found in verse 9:

Slide 1 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,

By the way, I think that Paul had this spiritual gift be plural – it’s gifts rather than gift – of healing because there are various kinds of illnesses. There’s mental illness. There are various kinds of physical illness. There are spiritual illnesses. So, we need different kinds of healings for different kinds of illnesses.

You say, “I want to learn about healing. I don’t know how to do it.” Well, you go to the training manual – the gospels. You observe the way Jesus healed and you say, “Well, as the Holy Spirit empowers me, I’m going to do that.” And I want you to see this in the life of one of Jesus’ followers, the Apostle Peter.

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The healing of Aeneas

Slide Acts 9:32-35

<sup>32</sup> As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord’s people who lived in Lydda. <sup>33</sup> There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. <sup>34</sup> “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. <sup>35</sup> All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

How did Peter learn how to do this? If you go back to the gospel of Mark which the early church believed was based upon the recollections of the Apostle Peter, Peter had seen Jesus heal a paralytic man who was also lying on a mat. In fact, the incident may have happened at Peter’s home in Capernaum. Peter was there and this is what he watched Jesus do.

We read in Mark 2:11

Slide Mark 2:11

<sup>11</sup> “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

Notice the way that Peter prayed.

Slide Acts 9:34

<sup>34</sup> “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.”

We don’t see Peter performing some special ritual or swinging a bell full of smoke over the man. He didn’t pray a specially written prayer for paralyzed people. Peter’s prayer – if you could call it that – was relatively brief. “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up!”

Where did he learn to pray that way? He listened to Jesus speaking to a paralyzed man in almost the exact same situation.

Slide Mark 2:11

<sup>11</sup> “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

I just want to make a simple point here. I’d suggest that most of us do not know how to pray for healings or for miracles. We often pray precisely the way Jesus told us NOT to pray. Jesus in Matthew 6:7 tells his followers

Slide Matthew 6:7

<sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Is it not the case that we fall into the trap of believing that God will only release a miracle through a lengthy prayer of ours? If we pray longer or harder or more intensely or with more words or we find the right words, then a miracle or a healing will come. I can’t tell you the number of times that people have prayed for me a prayer of well-meaning that was meant to make me feel good, but it wasn’t a biblical prayer to God. It wasn’t a prayer following the way of Jesus. I’ve had people pray things like, “Oh Lord, Rich, your servant, is in need. He’s done so much good for others. He labors constantly for the church. He is such a godly and holy person.”

You know, when somebody prays for me that way, I internally feel worse. I then go, “God, help me! You know I’m not worthy of anything.” The longer they go on praying about my holiness and my saintliness, the more unholy I feel. The longer the prayer goes on the more I want to fall down and say, “God, have mercy on me a sinner!”

We don’t need to remind God of the recipients’ worthiness or goodness. None of us deserves anything at the hands of God. We don’t earn miracles. Healings are an act of pure grace. We don’t have to tell God about our lengthy medical diagnosis. God knows better than any physician what the condition is and what caused it. We don’t need to beg God as if God is Ebenezer Scrooge – you know, a stingy miser whose pity we have to somehow invoke by getting on our hands and knees and begging. We don’t need to beat around the bush with God. “Dear God, regarding this person that I’m praying for who has a bad back. Help them to see that they are objects of your love regardless of whether or not you heal. Help them to understand that many have experienced bad backs. Grant them the serenity and peace to accept this particular cross.”

Jesus’ prayers in the gospel for healing are completely unlike most of the prayers we pray today. They were simple. They were direct. Jesus knew who he was talking to. He was talking to his Abba, Father. The result of this simple prayer of command, “Be

healed. Get up.” Is that in the case of people in the gospel of Mark, folks were amazed. And here in Acts 9, many were converted.

The gospels are meant to be a training manual. It’s like watching a YouTube video on how to do something that we don’t know how to do.

Let me give you one more illustration from Acts 9.

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The raising of Tabitha

Slide Acts 9:39-42

<sup>39</sup> Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

<sup>40</sup> Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. <sup>42</sup> This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

How did Peter learn how to pray for someone who is dead? He’d seen Jesus do this. He raised a synagogue ruler named Jairus’ daughter from the dead. And I want to show you how Peter imitated Jesus.

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The raising of Jairus’ daughter	The raising of Tabitha
- Jairus’ daughter dies from sickness	- Tabitha dies from sickness
- Those around Jairus’ household weep	- Tabitha’s friends weep
- Jesus keeps most people out of the room	- Peter keeps everyone out
- Jairus is a community benefactor	- Tabitha is a community benefactor
- Jesus says, “Arise!”	- Peter says, “Arise!”
- Jesus takes the little girl by the hand	- Peter takes Tabitha by the hand
- The resuscitated girl sits up	- Tabitha sits up
- Jesus brings a little girl back to her mother	- Peter hands Tabitha over to the widowed dependents
- The parents are amazed	- The people believe

The gospels are a training manual. Peter learned how to heal by imitating Jesus’ model of healing. And just parenthetically, I think there’s a wonderful reason why Jesus and Peter wanted to pray with just a few people rather than a room full of mourners and activity. I do believe that there is something about the environment when we’re praying for a sick person. When you’re in a hospital room and you’re trying to pray for a

sick friend, but the nurse keeps interrupting because she has to adjust the IV or is fluffing up the pillows and she's talking about medical procedures. Or there are parents and friends in the room who are talking and none of them are praying. It's virtually impossible in that kind of chaotic, unbelieving environment for healing to take place.

But when the atmosphere is full of faith and hope and love and there's a high level of expectation and the few people you're praying with are listening to God and they are waiting for the Holy Spirit to move, you're going to see people get healed. It's far easier to see people healed at a worship service when people have been worshipping God for 30 minutes where there are lots of people whose hearts are open to God than in a hospital environment where everyone in the room thinks you're a weirdo for praying.

Brothers and sisters, I could do the same thing to show you how the disciples learned from Jesus how to do miracles, how to exercise the gift of faith, how to prophesy, how to exercise the gift of wisdom or the gift of knowledge. But I want to simply say today that the ascended Jesus Christ has sent his Spirit into the world to fill his followers so that we carry on his ministry, his activity in this world and in our lives. To be a follower of Jesus is the most wonderful thing in the world.

Over time, the sharp edges of our personalities get smoothed off. If you follow Jesus you'll become kinder, less self-centered, less egotistical, more thoughtful, more open to other, more welcoming to people who have different opinions, more forgiving, more giving, more patient and more able to do the things that Jesus did in the gospels – healing the sick, casting out demons, capturing God's mind for a situation.

Here's what I'm going to do. Today I talked about following the way of Jesus. Some of you have never started on the road of following Jesus. Gospel call.

## The Jesus Way of Life

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Rich Nathan

October 5 & 6, 2019

Transforming Power for Your Life

Acts 9:32-45

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