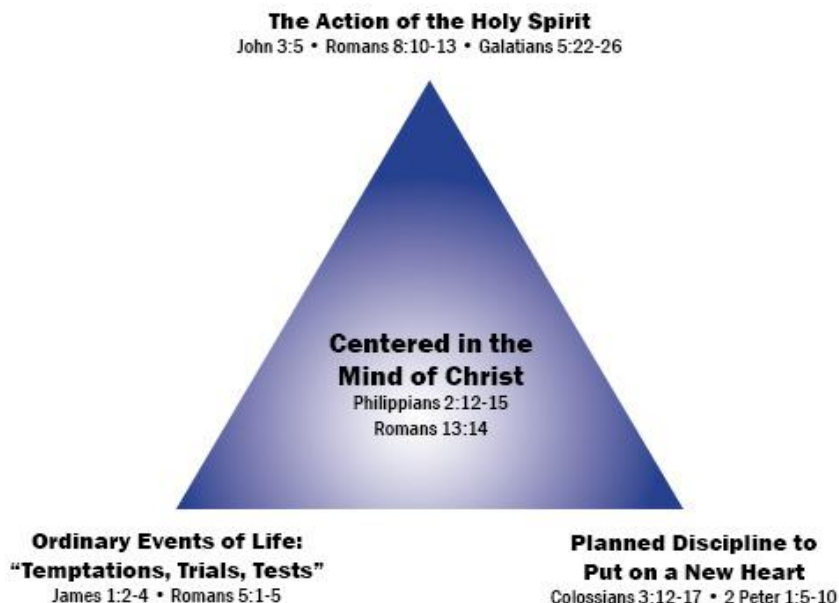


The Way of Jesus Week 5

*A 12 Week Seminar for Students of Jesus
St Stephens/Sewickley
January-March 2010*

Opening Discussion:

Q: Which of the four areas of the Golden Triangle would you like to see stronger in your life?



Q: Which of the 'spiritual disciplines' listed below might hold the most promise for your own formation in Christlikeness as we approach Lent?

Some Disciplines of Abstinence

Solitude

Fasting

Chastity

Sacrifice

Silence

Frugality

Secrecy

Confession

Some Disciplines of Engagement

Study

Service

Prayer

Submission

Worship

Celebration

Fellowship

Extra Giving

How Spiritual Change Happens, Part II 'The Christ Focus'

Spiritual change, formation into Christlikeness, happens in a dependant, interactive live with ('in') the living Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. That interactive relationship is, in fact, eternal life (John 17.3). In entering this life there are two 'preliminaries' and two 'substantive elements' of that should be thought about and embraced. These four together are what Dallas Willard calls 'The Christ Focus' (Knowing Christ Today, pp 150-156)

The First Preliminary: Humility

Matthew 18.3-5 Become like little children. The attitude that says 'we are in charge' and quite competent to manage our own lives keeps us from the kingdom. Little children, however, naturally and easily look for guidance and help.

Luke 18.9-14 Two men praying in church. A realistic view of your own brokenness, sinfulness, opens the door to the kingdom. 'Only the humble person will let God be God' (DW, 'Knowing...', p 151)

The Second Preliminary: Intention of Inward Rightness

Matthew 5.20 This is the settled intention to become like Christ, on the inside, 'in the hidden dimensions of the human character' that eluded the Pharisees. That inward life is launched by the new birth (John 3.3,5), and progressively touches our whole life as we live with him day by day and hour by hour.

The First Element: The Constant Presence of Christ Where We Are

The presence of the Kingdom here and now (Luke 17.20-21; Matt 4.17) and the availability of Christ in every and all circumstances (Matt 28.20) is the fundamental dynamic that brings sanctification to our lives. From our side this is 'the invocation, expectation, receptivity of God's presence and activity where we are and in what we are doing at any given time.' (DW, 'Knowing...', p 153)

The story of Frank Lauback, "Letters by a Modern Mystic" and Br Lawrence, "Practicing the Presence of God"

The Second Element: Obedience Where We Are

This brings us to the place where we are ready to do what pleases God in every circumstance. John 14.15-16, 21,23 is a good description of this interactive relationship. Its nature is love ('unpacked' by Jesus and his teachings), and our hearts are set to grow in that love. We 'follow Jesus for the sake of others' (Todd Hunter), 'expecting God to intervene with us to produce an outcome that is beyond all human ability.' (DW, 'Knowing...', p 155)

Learning to live a well ordered life anchored in these four things is unavoidable and essential if transformation is to be authentic. All of this, of course, takes shape according to the individual and to variations in culture, but the framework is stable and rooted in biblical reality, Kingdom life, and the experiences of Christians through 2000 years.

Homework for Week 5

- Read Colossians 3 this week, repeatedly, studying for content and then reading devotionally
- What could you do to more deeply embrace these 'preliminaries and elements' of Kingdom life? Can you take a step or two in this direction?
- Think again: which of the disciplines listed above might hold the most promise for you as you link over the current state of your life in Christ and where you sense God leading you?