

“DISCOVERING THE INTEGRATED LIFE”

Ephesians 4:1-16 ¹

What images come to mind as you consider the title of this sermon, “Discovering the Integrated Life”? For many of us, especially those who were teens or adults in the 1960’s, the word “integration” takes us first to the idea of racial integration.

According to *Wikipedia* (how did we ever live without it?), racial integration involves the process of ending systematic racial segregation as well as leveling barriers to association, creating equal opportunity regardless of race, and the development of a culture that draws on diverse traditions, rather than merely bringing a racial minority into the majority culture.² But according to *Wiktionary*, a new addition to *Wikipedia*, that’s the secondary definition of “integration.” The primary definition of “integration” is simply “the act or process of making whole or entire.”³

For five weeks, now, we’ve looked at characteristics of persons whom I call “Great Commission Christians.” And as I hope you remember, I use that term to describe believers whose lives are organized according to the patterns revealed in Jesus’ own life, persons in whose lives Kingdom principles are visibly at work.

The characteristics we’ve examined so far have been (1) a prayer-filled life, (2) a Bible-centered life; (3) a virtuous life; (4) a compassionate life; and last week, on Pentecost, (5) a Spirit-empowered life. Today I want to try to tie all that up using the sixth and final characteristic of a Great Commission Christian, for which I like the word “integrated.” This is the final step in God’s process of making us “whole or entire” as followers of Jesus.

Some years ago I saw some fellows in a Burger King who were wearing the uniform of a particular company. One of our members worked for that company, and I asked the guys whether they knew him. When they said they did, I told them that I was the other man’s pastor. Their response was, “We’re surprised that he has one.” That’s an example of what this final characteristic is *not*.

A Christian life is integrated when it is recognizably the same on Monday morning or on Saturday night as it is on Sunday morning. Another word I sometimes use for this characteristic is “congruent.” You may remember from high school geometry that congruent shapes coincide exactly when they’re superimposed one on the other.⁴ That’s what I’m talking about here—a life that is exactly the same shape every day and every time of day, every week; and not only are Great Commission Christian lives self-consistent and self-congruent, but they are increasingly congruent over time with the character of Jesus Himself.

Susanna Wesley, the mother of the great preachers Charles and John Wesley, was the twenty-fifth child of Dr. Samuel Annesley of London, England. She herself had nineteen children in twenty years, though only ten survived infancy. Susanna was known as a woman of prayer, and one of her recorded prayers went like this:

“Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Thy presence. So may my every word and action have a moral content. . . . May all things instruct me and

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on June 3, 2012.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_integration

³ <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/integration>

⁴ <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/congruent>

afford me an opportunity of exercising some virtue and daily learning and growing toward Thy likeness.”⁵ That’s the prayer of a congruent, integrated soul.

Two verses from our text are especially connected to this idea of “integration.” Please turn again in your Bibles to Ephesians 4, and we’ll look at verses 1 and 15: ¹ *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to **live a life worthy of the calling you have received.** . . . ¹⁵ *speaking the truth in love, we will **grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.****

The point of this whole “Great Commission Christian Enterprise” is that you and I will “live lives worthy of the calling we have received, growing to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” The Greek word translated “calling” in this verse is the word κλησεως (“CLAY-seh-ose”), which is a form of the verb κλησις (“CLAY-sis”), which means “to call.”

The New Testament word for the Church is εκκλησια (“ek-clay-SEE-ah”), which means “the called out ones.” And our term, “vocation,” comes from the Latin “vocatio,” which means “to be called.”

My friend, Steve Hadden, has observed that although the world is forever asking “What do you do?”, this is really the wrong question to be asking. The question we should be asking is “What are you doing with your life?”⁶ The question of what we’re doing with our lives is the question of vocation, and it has everything to do with this matter of being a Great Commission Christian.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that our vocation as Christians is to first be reconciled with God ourselves, and then to become God’s agents of reconciliation in the world. To “have a vocation” means to have a purpose for living that is joined with the purposes of God.

Being God’s agents of reconciliation and transformation in the world is what being Great Commission Christians is all about; and this calling is to be central, not peripheral. The whole life of the Christian is to be centered in vocation under God. Vocation is about following Jesus as we respond to God’s gracious invitation to use our own unique gifts and abilities to help move the cosmos toward its appointed end.

Jesus told us that God’s Most Important Commandment is this: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these*” (Mark 12:29-31).

Using these two commands as their definition of Christian maturity that “is worthy of the calling we have received,” researchers in Chicago have recently pointed out that “Spiritual growth—defined as an increase in love of God and for others— . . . advances in lockstep with a *growing personal relationship with Christ.*”⁷

Let me say that last sentence again: “Spiritual growth advances in lockstep with a growing personal relationship with Christ.” The key to a life that is prayer-filled, Bible-

⁵ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (HarperOne, 2001), p. 237.

⁶ Stephen L. Hadden, “A Vocation Clarification Seminar for College Students at Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Kentucky” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), p. 12.

⁷ Greg Hawkins & Cally Parkinson, *MOVE: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), p. 126.

centered, virtuous, compassionate, integrated, and spiritually powerful is not found in a bunch of church activities to attend, even very good activities. The key to a Great Commission Christian Life is not found in the study of spiritual truths and principles, even very good ones. **The Key to the Abundant Life Jesus offers is the experience of a deep and abiding love relationship with Him** (John 10:10).

It's only in soul friendship with Jesus that we find lives that matter and relationships that last. That's why we choose to become followers of Jesus. It is only in soul friendship with Jesus that our heart hungers are satisfied, but it's important to note that soul friendship is a very different thing than mere religious acquaintance.

The great Christian philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, described such religious *acquaintance* as being “just about as genuine as tea made from a bit of paper which once lay in a drawer beside another bit of paper which had once been used to wrap up a few dried tea leaves from which tea had already been made three times.”⁸ The truth is that Jesus, not Coca-Cola, is “the real thing,” and nothing less than soul friendship with Him can satisfy our deepest yearnings and needs.

Churches tend to be filled with people who really do want to experience lives that matter and relationships that last, and who rightly understand that Jesus holds the keys to these gifts. At the same time, it's also very frequently the case that these same people only dabble in the Way of Jesus, not really taking it very seriously in the whole scope of their lives.

This may happen because we've not understood that heart satisfaction comes only from deep friendship with Jesus, not from halfhearted religious activities. And even when we do understand this, Jesus warned us of the danger that “*the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful*” (Mark 4:19). I must further warn you that dabbling in the Way of Jesus is almost worse than not knowing Him at all, because it causes us to think that following Jesus doesn't really work, inoculating us against faith's more virile forms.

Just as in any other friendship, we develop deep relationship with God through consistent and significant communication. Such communication involves speaking to God and allowing God to speak to us; and, over time, such soul friendship develops godly character in us that results in redemptive action in the world.

Organizing our lives around following Jesus is not something that we do in order to be “religious,” but is rather something we do in order to satisfy the deepest hungers of our hearts. I like the way that Aslan, the Christ figure in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, put it at the end of all the stories: “You do not yet look so happy as I mean for you to be.”⁹ If you can't imagine Jesus saying that to you, then you do not yet know Him in the kind of friendship He intends with you.

And if you can't imagine how to get to such a place from where you are, come back next week, when I'll give you a more detailed road map of how to accomplish it. But right now, we have an appointment with Jesus for dinner, so let's get ready for that . . .

⁸ Malcomb Muggeridge, *A Third Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), p.138.

⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (London: The Bodley Head, 1956), p. 226.