

“THE WAY MANUAL”
Ephesians 4:25-5:2 August 11, 2024

In 1961, Golden Press began printing **Mechanix Illustrated – How to do it Encyclopedia**. People would buy a subscription and each month a new hardback volume would come out containing instructions for DIYs on a variety of building projects. Brick laying, Electrical work, cabinet making, boat building, guest cabins, and just about anything else you can imagine. Of course nowadays, you can pull up a YouTube video, or google the instructions for most home projects. But back then one either needed a mentor or a book on the subject.

My father was one of those ultimate DIY. A machinist and electrician by trade. There were few projects he couldn't tackle. Building cars, addition to the house, siding, plastering, plumbing, watch repair, you name he could figure out a way to do it. When he passed away, I inherited his 16-volume collection of **Mechanix Illustrated Encyclopedias**. Even though some of the building techniques are outdated there's still good information and it makes for an interesting read, at least to those of us who like that stuff.

Last week, I stated that Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus could be read as a how to do discipleship training manual. While he doesn't give step by step instructions, Paul writes down some practical directions for those who desire to follow Jesus. Paul's goal is for us to become in reality what in our baptism we professed to be. How do we live into this faith? Let us take a peek at these directions and hopefully they will help us in our own journey.

I. TAKE OUR THE TRASH

Paul's first instruction to the blossoming disciples is “**Take Out the Trash.**”

Have you ever gone on vacation, come home and suddenly get hit with a strange odor, only to realize that you forgot to take out the trash before you left? While you were away, that chicken carcass was rotting, and vegetables were fermenting, and the onions well you get the picture. In response, you quickly drop your luggage, hold your breath, open the windows, and get that garbage out of there. Meanwhile, your spouse is spraying everything with Febreze.

Stinking trash is not a nice smell. No one wants to be around it. Guess what? A stinking spirit gets the same reaction. Paul instructs, “**Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice.**” When Paul says **Put Away** he doesn't mean pick up your toys and put them away. No, he means kick these things to the curb.

Bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander and malice; All that stuff rots the spirit, takes away our joy, and makes it difficult for others to be around you. Those attributes stink up the place. Who wants to be around someone who is constantly complaining, miserable, and mad about life? Take out the trash.

This doesn't mean our hurts aren't real or that we ignore the pain of the world. We all have hurts, regrets, and events in our life that we are ashamed of. We have been mistreated, betrayed, abused, disrespected, and taken advantage of. We might come from awful family situations,

grown up in poverty, struggle with health issues, made some bad life choices, or experienced deep loss. Crappy things in life happen to everyone on some level. Everyone who has ever lived knows some kind of hurt. The question is, what do you do with your hurts? Are your hurts handling you or are you handling them?

Paul writes, “**Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.**” Now I don’t know what your view on the personification of evil is, but I do believe in the idea of spiritual warfare. There is a battle going on inside of us especially in our hurt areas. That’s where we are vulnerable. The problem with hurts is they can fester, rot, and go gangrene thus poisoning our spirit.

Anger can get the better of us and cause us to make poor decisions and even harm others. If we hold on to it long enough it turns to bitterness, which sours our relationships and view on life. Take out the trash! That means acknowledging our anger and hurt. Don’t bury it, expose it. Examine what is stoking the fire; pride, inconvenience, value challenge. Go to Jesus, ask for help, seek healing. Forgive. Find better reactions. Take out the trash. The worst option is to let it rot your spirit. You’re inviting the devil to move on in.

II. RECYCLE

The second instruction is **RECYCLE**. According to Earth.org “Plastic consumption has [quadrupled in the past 30 years](#), and is expected to [triple in the next 30](#). Meanwhile, global plastic recycling rates have [failed to reach two digits](#). Less than [10%](#) of all the plastic ever

produced has been recycled. While many of us are doing our part to save the planet and dutifully putting our plastics in recycling bins — it is nearly all one big charade. Why? Because recycling bins do not take your recyclables to fancy facilities to actually recycle them. In fact, just [5% of U.S. plastic waste is](#) properly recycled. 95% goes to landfills and oceans.

Although the world struggles to recycle plastic, other materials like aluminum, paper, and glass are recycled successfully. Aluminum is one of the most recycled and recyclable materials used today. Recycled aluminum [saves producers 95% of the energy](#) needed to produce new aluminum. Nearly [75% of all aluminum ever produced](#) is still in use today in the U.S alone.

Glass is another recycling success story. Germany and Switzerland both have approximately a [90% recycling rate for glass](#). The U.S. has remained relatively stagnant with around a [30% glass recycling rate](#) but the higher numbers in Europe show that productive glass recycling is achievable. Glass recycling also benefits from the fact that it can be done endlessly [without a loss in quality](#). Given these statistics, is it not time to return to using materials like these once again much more prolifically?”

Paul said, “Those who steal must give up stealing; rather, let them labor, doing good work with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”

Paul does something interesting here. Instead of just telling people to stop stealing or stop hurting others with your words, he tells them recycle, or to do the opposite, give and build up. He is repurposing what would be disciples do with their hands and words. Instead of using your gifts to harm others, use your gifts to help others.

Do the Opposite. Instead of cursing – bless. Instead of taking advantage give the advantage to the other. Instead of being a drain on society be an asset. Instead of tearing apart encourage. Instead of stealing begin sharing.

God has been in the recycling business all along. God takes that which was broken, injured, lost, and dead and by grace and power – God mends, heals, finds, and resurrects. Recycle your gifts and abilities for good just like God has recycled us.

III. ASK FOR HELP –

A boy and his father were walking along a road when they came across a large stone. The boy said to his father, “**Do you think if I use all my strength, I can move this rock?**” His father answered, “**If you use all your strength, I am sure you can do it.**”

The boy began to push the rock. Exerting himself as much as he could, he pushed and pushed. The rock did not move. Discouraged, he said to his father, “**You were wrong, I can’t do it.**” The father placed his arm around the boy’s shoulder and said, “**No, son, you didn’t move the rock because you didn’t use all your strength — you didn’t ask me to help.**”

Making change is hard. Breaking and making new habits is challenging. Living a new life in Christ seems impossible, unless we are willing to ask for help. Paul states, “**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.**”

We can look at grieving the spirit a couple of different ways. One way to grieve the Spirit is to act in ways which are counter to God’s will. Like a wayward child who grieves their parents because of their bad behavior. When we live hating and hurting others we grieve God’s spirit.

But another way could look at this grieving of the Spirit. When we refuse the Spirit’s help and work in our lives, we are rejecting God. We are telling God I don’t need you. I can do it on my own. Which of course is a delusion and lie.

Kari O’Driscoll, *The Writing Life* wrote, “I contemplated that platitude — that we are never given more than we can handle — and found it lacking. I can count many times in my own life where I felt overloaded with grief or responsibility or pure ignorance in the face of obstacles.

I decided that, instead, we are often faced with more than we can handle and maybe this is by design. I know that when I find myself in that position what I have learned is to ask for help. For most of my life I thought that asking for help was the definition of weakness and was determined to figure things out on my own. The messages I got from my parents and the media and society as a whole informed me that

independence is an important trait. That people who do things on their own are revered and praised.

I was in my 30s before I realized that the only thing independence got me was isolation and a deeper hole. I felt lonely and less capable than ever when I tried to handle everything by myself and, while I may have eventually found my way out of that hole I was in, I didn't do it in the most efficient way — often reinventing the wheel as part of my process — and I was bloody exhausted by the time I got out.

And so, in that light, maybe I can appreciate (just the slightest bit) being given more than I can handle on occasion, if only to remind me that I should reach out and ask for help. If only to help me recognize how much farther I can go when I am supported by others, buoyed by their wisdom and love.”

The only way to live the life of a disciple is to ask for help, from God and from the others who travel along the way. You don't have to carry the load all by yourself, and you are not meant to. God's Spirit is with us to empower, guide, and help. Why not ask?

IV. IMITATE

I find it a hoot to watch young children imitate their parents. Last week my daughter sent a video of her youngest daughter attempting to walk around in my daughter's high heel shoes. Her awkward, unbalanced bowlegged stance got a chuckle out of me. It also reminded me that children learn by imitating those around them, for good for ill. In fact, Paul's last discipleship instruction was, “**Therefore, be imitators**

of God, as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Daniel Clendenin, *Journey with Jesus* writes, “Lately, I have tried the following experiment: Whenever I am repulsed by a homeless bum who loiters near our home, or nurse a grudge against a friend who spurned me or envy someone more successful than I am, I try to picture that person as a little baby or child.

I then find it far easier to welcome or receive them only as a precious human being, rather than someone who can help or harm me, as someone I might ignore, fear or flatter. The simple act of welcoming another person in that way, Jesus says, is to welcome him, and, in turn, to welcome God the Father who sent him.

Similarly, to become or imitate children, as Jesus commands, is to understand our own selves in the same manner, not as people whose significance rests in titles, honors, successes or failures, as if those might gain or deny us favor with God and man, but in the knowledge that we are human beings loved by God. That, says Jesus, is the only way to experience the presence of his kingdom.”

If you desire to follow Jesus and live the Kingdom Life on earth, then Paul instructs, Take out the Trash, Recycle, Ask for Help, and Imitate the love and sacrifice of the one who has called you. Here endeth the lesson. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, August 11, 2024

Second Scripture Lesson

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

²⁵So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

5Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.