

"Do Not Disappoint" List

Who do you fear disappointing? Your spouse? Your child? Your boss?

People can wind up on our "do not disappoint" list for good and bad reasons. Bad reasons might include fear of rejection or harsh punishment. Good reasons might include a desire to give someone joy or earn their respect.

And what about Jesus? Is he on your "do not disappoint: list, too? And if he's on your list, why?

Disappointing Jesus

In today's gospel Mark tells us the story of a rich young man who ended up disappointing Jesus.

Now, this guy started out going in a very positive direction. Rushing up to Jesus, he politely asks for advice. **"Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?"** In the conversation which follows, we learn this guy was no slouch when it came to the spiritual life. He was definitely on the right track.

When Jesus names some things he considered essential for living a faithful, good life - don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat, honor your father and mother - the rich young man said, **"Teacher, I have - from my youth -kept them all"**

What Jesus quoted, of course, came from the 10 Commandments, but I think he could've just as easily named Wesley's 3 Simple Rules - do no harm, do good and stay in love with God- and this guy would've still said, "been there, done that" to those rules, too.

This young man of means was on the right track. And Mark tells us - and please don't forget this statement - **"Jesus looked at him and loved him."**

Love the Driving Force

Love was the driving force behind Jesus' response to the rich young man. He loved this man so much he wanted him to continue to grow into all he could be. To want anything less ran contrary to Jesus' love for him.

That's why Jesus asked him to take the next step:

You lack one thing: go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.

This was the next step for this man needed to take. In other gospel stories, Jesus invited different people to take different next steps

- for the Samaritan woman at the well, the next step involved seeking strength in God instead of in a series of failed relationships.
- for a tax collector named Zachaeus the next step was to refund those he'd cheated and begin treating everyone fairly.
- for a blind beggar named Bartimaeus the next step was to assert what he wanted most in life without apology: **"let me see again."**

And for us, what is our next step? I wouldn't claim to know for sure what your next step needs to be, but I'm sure there is a next step, because living the life Jesus wants for us, a life of doing no harm, of doing good, and of staying in love with God, is a life-long journey, a journey of a 1000 next steps.

As we come to the end of our Three Simple Rules program, you and I are asked to consider what our next step might be.

Stumbled, but Not Stranded

Sadly, the rich young man in today's story wasn't willing to take his next step and he stumbled away from God. As Peterson puts it, **"he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go."**

No doubt Jesus was deeply disappointed as he watched him go because, as Mark says, he loved this young man. I have to wonder if the man would've made a different choice if he'd understood this love. Surely whatever he'd have had to give up couldn't possibly have been as great as the love which held of him.

Though we never read about the rich young man again in the Bible, hopeful stories circulated in the early church about his eventually return to Jesus. Fact-based or not, such stories speak truth about the openness and tenacity of Jesus' love. It is a love that, as the old hymn testifies, "wilt not let you go."

We may stumble away from Jesus, but he's never content to leave us stranded. Indeed, he wants each and every one of us to move forward, to continue to grow, to become all God intends us to be.

And so he invites us to take the next step.

Good Going So Far

You know, these past five weeks you and I have been moving in a good direction and I want us to celebrate the path we've been. Our study of the "Three Simple Rules" has been no small thing:

- 175-200 people have been in worship each Sunday to pray, sing, and preach these rules into our hearts and minds.
- Nearly a hundred of us have picked up a copy of this little brown book and many of us have read it. And an equal number of our companion devotional guide have been taken and used on a daily basis.

Continue to Grow

Mark 10:17-22

"Next Steps"

- Over the last five week every Sunday school class from first grade on up through adult has made doing no harm, doing good and staying in love with God the focus of their learning
- and over 50 people meeting in 6 small groups have meet weekly to pray and offer each other support toward living the Three Simple Rules.

I believe all of this has delighted Jesus. I believe he's been watching us and loving us for our attitude and effort. And because he loves us, I believe he's now urging us to take the next step.

You remember my 7th grade English Teacher Mrs. Casper's motto: be specific. So let's begin to get specific about our next step:

Perhaps Jesus is inviting you to do no harm by

- addressing a harmful habit or addiction you've identified during these past five weeks.
- Or maybe your next step is to cease doing harm by getting serious about mending a broken relationship. Maybe you need to offer or seek forgiveness.

Maybe Jesus is inviting you to take the next step in doing good by:

- seeking a more involved leadership role in the church or in the community.
- Or maybe you are being challenged to increase your financial giving to church or to another organization that alleviates human suffering.

Or maybe your growing edge involves taking a new step toward staying in love with God by:

- increasing your worship attendance if you're not an "every Sunday" person
- or setting aside time everyday to read the Bible and pray.
- Or maybe you feel a nudge to continue meeting with your small group. Why not have that conversation with them this week.

As I said before, I'm not certain I could nail down what your next step ought to be, but I know there's one for you to take, just as

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there's one for me to take. I'd be glad to talk it over with you. Maybe we can help each other discern what this might be.

But let's not let each other stumble or get stuck in place. We're on the way to some place very good, a place beside Jesus, a place of blessing. A place we certainly don't want to miss. Jesus certainly needs to be on our "do not disappoint" list, but I think he wants us to be sure we have ourselves listed there. Growth may be difficult and challenging, but life with Jesus will never disappoint.