

Discipleship Checkup

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[0 : 00] Well, please do have a seat, and if you have a Bible there, or maybe just grab one on the pews, or scroll down in your phone, or whatever you need to do to get God's Word in front of you, Luke chapter 17 is where we are this morning.

And while you're turning there, let me thank everyone who's been up front this morning for your part in the service so far. I loved Pete. Where's Pete?

Is he? He's there. Did you say 1984 when you were a Christian didn't seem that long ago? Do you know what age I was? I was minus one in 1984. A long time ago.

A lot has happened. But here we are, Luke chapter 17, and let's pray as we come to God's Holy Word this morning. Dearest Father, we would still ourselves as we come to your Word now, and humbly ask that your Word would shine its truth into every area of our lives.

Lord, that you would blow away every cobweb that's in our hearts, and Lord, you would capture every thought of our mind to Christ. And would you help us leave here this morning changed, because we've met with you.

[1 : 12] And this is our prayer made in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's read Luke chapter 17 and the first 10 verses together, shall we? Beginning at verse 1, Jesus said to his disciples, So watch yourselves.

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them. And if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day, and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, you must forgive them.

The apostles said to the Lord, increase our faith. He replied, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you.

Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, come along now and sit down to eat? Won't he rather say, prepare my supper?

Get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you may eat and drink. Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, We are unworthy servants.

[2 : 46] We have only done our duty. Amen. This is God's word to us this morning. Well, I don't know how you're feeling about the week to come. I'll tell you how I'm feeling about the week to come.

I am dreading the week to come. Because, I'll tell you why. Because, for the first time in a long time, I've got a dentist appointment. And I had that sinking feeling this week because even I, I've got no idea what a filling looks like.

But even I, when I get the torch on my iPhone and I shine it in there, even I can see that there's fillings in there. So, I'm dreading next week. But, I go because I know check-ups are good for us, aren't they?

They're good for us. And check-ups keep us healthy. And what we're going to see this morning is we're going to see Jesus give his followers a discipleship check-up.

And as we get into Luke 17 this morning, what we need to understand is that as we sit in on these verses, as we see Jesus give his disciples a check-up, he's coming after our hearts as well this morning.

[3 : 53] Now, you say, why is he coming after our hearts? Because he loves us too much to see us stay as we are. So, here in Luke 17, Jesus is coming after our hearts this morning.

Now, we're at the end of this mini subsection of Luke that started at chapter 13 and verse 22. And it's going to finish at chapter 17, verse 11. And if you remember, we said the big question of this section is what do the people of Jesus' kingdom look like?

And this is almost, I don't know if you've noticed this as we've journeyed through Luke over the past few weeks, it's almost as if Luke has been showing us what they don't look like. Because we've met these Pharisees.

We've been flies on the wall to some pretty heated encounters and with some pretty strong words going on between Jesus and the Pharisees. And we've seen it, haven't we? Jesus has been rebuking them because they've zero compassion for people.

And he's been rebuking them, exposing them as being people who pick and choose the bits of God's law that they want to obey and those bits that they want to disobey. And he's been warning them about their abuse of their money.

[5 : 05] And he's been showing them that they need to wake up and consider eternity. And do you see how Luke tells us at verse 1 that Jesus now turns to address his disciples?

And Jesus reminds them of what the lives of his people are to be marked by. And so at the end of this section we see that Jesus gives his disciples a check-up.

Now here's what I want to encourage you to do this morning because this is the fear that I had ahead of my check-up next week. I was half tempted this week to phone and cancel. I was half tempted this week to rearrange for a couple of weeks' time.

I was half tempted almost picturing that I would get to that waiting room and then I would bolt out of there. But can I encourage you this morning as we come to a discipleship check-up to get in the chair.

Okay? Get in the chair because check-ups can hurt, but check-ups keep us healthy. Okay? So as we're in the waiting room this morning, as we're waiting for the meat of the passages, we're waiting for the heat of the check-up, let's get in the chair.

[6 : 13] Okay? Here we go. Here are the words of Jesus. And these are life-giving words. We love Jesus. And we want his words of wisdom and of truth and of grace to shape us and to fill us and to mould us.

We want us to be in the way. Individually as believers here this morning, but corporately as a church. Check-ups can hurt, but check-ups keep us healthy.

So all I want us to see this morning is that Jesus outlines two traits, two marks that are to be characteristics of his disciples. Here's the first mark, verses 1 to 4.

Holiness. Holiness. See the instructions that Jesus gives at verse 3. He says, pay attention. Stay awake.

Be on guard. Now immediately as a reader, I'm looking at that and I'm thinking, wow, that is strong. And I need to heed the words of Jesus here.

[7 : 17] I better listen. And I don't know if you've noticed this as we've gone through. I love how Jesus does this. He doesn't offer advice. He's not into giving 10 tips for a happy life, is he?

He doesn't hide his words because that's not the game that he's in. He's into truth, which is wonderful because I need, out of all the competing voices that are in this world, I need truth to build my life upon.

I need truth. So here we go. I need God's truth. Here's the first check-up question that Jesus asks his disciples. Are you sinning? Verse 1.

Sobering words. Temptations to sin are sure to come. Guaranteed. Guaranteed. Guaranteed. Now I went to pick up my girls from nursery a few weeks ago.

And I got in there and I looked around. And in this corner there's snotty noses. And in this corner there's coughs and sneezes. In this corner there's parents being told that their children are sick.

[8 : 17] In this corner there's kids being changed. Nappies. Lovely. Lovely sight. So I decided this week to get a flu jab. So I went to the doctors. I got my flu jab.

This thing that's supposed to keep me immune from getting the flu. Now here's what we need to see with these verses here. Jesus is telling his disciples, reminding them, that when they come to follow him, he doesn't give them a temptation flu jab.

He doesn't say, come to me and I will make you immune from temptation. I will make you immune from sin. No, he says temptations are sure to come.

The question is not, will temptations come? The question is, what will you do when temptations come? Will you fold like a pack of cards? That urge to gossip.

That harbouring of resentment. That flicking of the TV channels. Those browsing of the websites. Now once when I was a younger Christian, I had an older Christian come up to me and tell me, Graham, you cannot stop the birds flying above your head.

[9 : 22] But you can stop them nesting in your hair. And that's good advice. It's good advice. Temptations to sin are sure to come.

The question is, will you stand tall? Will you say no to self? Will you deny self and say yes to Christ? That's what Jesus is telling his disciples here. Temptations to sin are sure to come to you.

But do you see how he goes on to say, make every effort to ensure that they don't come through you. Make sure that you're not the source of your brother and sister stumbling.

Of causing one of these little ones. I think he's probably referring there to God's children. But probably in the context as well, he's referring there to, do you remember we've seen these outsiders, these unlikelies who are coming into the kingdom, who are meeting Jesus, being saved.

These little ones. Because that's exactly what the Pharisees are doing. Stay away. Stay away. Jesus is saying, don't cause any of these little ones to sin, to stumble.

[10 : 28] And he gives this vivid picture, doesn't he, of this man with the, having a millstone tied around his neck and being thrown into the sea. It's quite a vivid image. You can picture it. That's how serious a thing this is, says Jesus.

And see here that that is how concerned God is for the protection of his people. That is how concerned God is for the purity of his children. Because if you're found to be causing others to sin, then actually that millstone in the sea, you go to your death.

That's a better option for you. And what else is coming? It's a warning, isn't it, from Jesus. So we have to ask ourselves this morning.

Again, this is the hard bit of the checkup, isn't it? Are we sinning? By our deeds, by our words. Particularly, are we causing offense to other brothers and sisters?

Are we just getting in the way of them coming to know Jesus by the way that we're conducting ourselves? Jesus asked his disciples this morning, are you sinning? You see, checkups can hurt.

[11 : 38] But checkups keep us healthy. Here's the second searching question that Jesus asks. Are you forgiving? Verse 3. If your brother sins, rebuke him.

So love him enough. Love her enough to speak to them. And graciously show them that what they are doing is out of step. It's not bringing glory to God. And bring them back.

And if they genuinely repent, if they acknowledge the error of their ways, forgive them. Even if that happens seven times in one day. It's interesting as you read up on it, you realize that accepted Jewish custom in this day is that you would forgive somebody three times in a day.

See how Jesus here again, he's just raising the bar. Raising the bar of what it means to follow him. Even if that happens seven times in a day. If you go through that cycle seven times, you're still to forgive.

Do you see how forgiveness? Do you see how fought for unity? Do you see how hammered out holiness, hammered out harmony is to be right at the heart of God's people? And what a witness that is to a watching world that is fractured.

[12 : 46] As they look in here and as they see so many different people from so many different walks of life, from so many different parts of the world, together under the banner of Jesus Christ.

Right at the heart of the community of God's people. Now I remember being at a wedding a few number of years ago. And during the service, the minister said to the couple that two of the most important words in your marriage, two of the most important phrases in your marriage that you should never get tired of saying.

Number one, I'm sorry. And number two, I forgive you. I remember hearing that and thinking that's very simplistic. But you know what? Actually, I found that to be some of the most profound wisdom I found in my married life.

And I take it if that is to be central to our husband and wife relationship, how much more central should it be to our relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ? Time and time again, a godly determination as God's people to not let bitterness harbor.

To not a steely resolution, not to let anger fester, not to let bitterness and envy grow. So, you know, as you read the pastoral epistles, as you read Paul's letters, you see him using language, don't you?

[14 : 01] He says to Christians, bear with one another. Strive for the unity of the Spirit. Agree in the Lord. Now you have to ask, why does he need to write that stuff? Well, surely he needs to write that stuff because he recognizes that this is hard.

And he recognizes that he is just like everyone else. He is just a sinful creature trying to work out the Christian life. Trying to do it rubbing shoulders with other sinful creatures trying to work out the Christian life.

Of course there's going to be friction. So he says, bear with one another. Strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Agree in the Lord. Let me ask you, do you need to say sorry to someone this morning?

Do you need to say, I forgive you to someone this morning? Do you need to say to somebody, let's meet up and let's chat it out? But Jesus is asking us this morning, are you forgiven?

Sorry, are you forgiving? See, checkups can hurt, can't they? They can hurt. But checkups keep us healthy. So the first mark of the true disciple that Jesus lays out for his followers here.

[15 : 10] Holiness. Holiness. Holiness. And I don't know how you feel as you contemplate that bar. That discipleship bar that Jesus sets. As you contemplate that bar and then you have a look within your own heart and you see the depths.

You see the depths of the stuff that's in there. And you think, there's the high bar and here's me. What chance have I got? I know that in my own life. I read this passage this week and I found myself saying, Lord Jesus, I want to obey.

I want to forgive. I want to pursue holiness. But I find this so hard. I find this so hard. And the more I've thought about it this week, I think that's, if that's how you're feeling.

And I hope it is. Then I think that's exactly where we're supposed to be. And I think that's exactly what we see next. Because here's the second mark, verses 5 to 10.

Humility. Here's the third check-up question that Jesus asks his disciples. Are you praying? Are you praying? So in light of that high bar, in light of their fallen hearts, it's little wonder that Jesus' listeners turn to him, examining themselves and say, Lord, what did they say?

[16 : 22] See it? Lord, increase our faith. Increase our faith. Exclamation mark. Do you feel the desperation in their voices? Lord, we need you. We need you.

We need you to help us in our battle with sin. We need you to help us as a community to forgive one another. We need you to keep our hearts warm.

And I think probably most of all, Lord Jesus, you need to help us have a bigger understanding of who you are. And that resonates with me. Because I look, I read this morning Colossians chapter 1.

If you want to check it out, the second half of it after this. Colossians chapter 1. What does Paul write? That Jesus Christ was before all things. And through Jesus Christ are all things.

And in Jesus Christ, all things hold together. And in Jesus Christ, all things were created for him. You see how the Bible, as you read it, it paints this cosmic picture, this grand picture of who Jesus Christ is.

[17 : 25] And as I look at that cosmic picture, and I look at my shallow appreciation of Jesus, I'm exactly there with those disciples.

Lord, increase my faith. Help me understand your cosmic greatness. How often are you just like a fun-sized Jesus that I can fit in my pocket? Father, would you blow my mind with your greatness?

And in passing, notice who's asking this question. A little detail, a little subtle detail in the text there. To see how Luke, he slightly changes the terminology at verse 5.

So verse 1, Jesus was addressing the disciples. Verse 5, Luke tells us that it's the apostles who turned to address Jesus. Now I've been chewing on that all week. All week.

All week. Why does Luke change the term there? Well, apart from just recording the facts, I imagine it's because as readers of this, I think that's meant to encourage us.

[18 : 30] If the apostles, if these 12 men who Jesus chose back in chapter 6, if these men who would go on to become the pillars of the church, if these men who would go forth with the message of Jesus to a lost world, if they are praying, Lord, increase my faith, increase our faith, then I read that and I think there's hope for me.

There's hope for me. As I pray, Lord, increase my faith. These men prayed, Lord, increase my faith. Lord Jesus, we need you. We need you.

Every hour, we need you. Some of you may have heard of a godly woman called Joni Erikson Tadda. Just a wonderful example of what it means to cry out, Jesus, I need you.

17-year-old Joni involved in a tragic diving accident and it leaves her a quadriplegic, consigned to life in a wheelchair without the use of her arms.

I was reading up this week that somebody once asked her, what is the first thing that she says to God every time that she wakes up in the morning? I wonder how you'd answer that question. I think I'd probably go for her, God, I hate you.

[19 : 45] I hate you. But do you know what she wrote? Do you know what she responded to that? She says this, get this. My weakness, that is my quadriplegia, is my greatest asset because it forces me into the arms of Jesus every single time that I get up in the morning.

So I look at that and I would say, God, I hate you. She gets up every morning and says, God, I need you. God, I need you. And look at the promise that Jesus makes, verse 6.

If you had faith, he says, look what he says. If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, up, and it would be into the sea. Now we've heard, haven't we, in Luke's gospel, we've seen Jesus refer to the mustard seed before.

If you want to flip back later to chapter 13, Jesus has been talking about what the kingdom of heaven is like. He uses a mustard seed. Well, here he is getting the apostles to picture that mustard seed again, the smallest seed imaginable, this time to illustrate how the smallest amount of faith will lead to quite remarkable results.

Do you see him? He speaks about this mulberry tree, this tree that's renowned for having really deep, deep roots. This tree will just be upped and thrown into the ocean, just like that.

[21 : 09] Now, what is Jesus doing? Do you see how straight after their prayer, the Lord increase our faith? Do you see how he turns the attention not to the size of their faith, but he turns their attention to the object of their faith?

You see, Jesus is showing them and he's throwing them to trust, to live their lives, not in their greatness, not in their strength, but on the greatness of their God. It's not about how great your faith is, he's saying.

It's about how great your God is. And of course, you just think about these apostles as we read them in the Gospels that they're just like you and me in some respects.

Do we not read them? They are confused. They are slow. They are cowardly as we meet them in the Gospels. But you fast forward to the book of Acts and the same people, we see them in faith-filled and spirit-inspired action.

We see them preaching. We see them witnessing. We see them healing. We see them suffering. Truly, even the smallest amount of faith will lead to remarkable results. Are you praying?

[22 : 15] I think that's a wonderful thing that Kate was saying here this morning about are we praying? Lord, would you give me the boldness to take that leaflet, whatever it is, and invite somebody to tell them about you.

That's a wonderful thing to be praying for. But I think, as we've been reading this as well, I think even in the immediate context, this is true. Because I don't know about you, but I find the battle with sin, I find it so hard making the same mistakes again and again and again and again.

How patient God is with me. I find forgiveness. I find not dwelling on stuff. I find that so difficult. Letting it go. I wonder if some of us here this morning, in our battle for holiness, I wonder if some of us have got to the point where we feel like that is impossible.

Here is a call from Jesus not to trust in the size of our faith, not to trust in our steely determination, our resolve to get better at things, but to trust in the all-sufficient grace and the power of God and His Spirit at work in our lives, transforming us day by day by day by day more into likeness of Jesus.

A famous old hymn I was reminded of of John Newton. The slave trader turned Christian minister. One of his hymns, I asked the Lord that I might grow in faith and in love and in every grace.

[23 : 42] Might more of His salvation know and seek more earnestly His face. That's the cry of desperation. That is the cry of a mature Christian.

He says, Lord, I need you. I need you. Let me ask you this morning as a messy and a broken creature, with a messy and a broken family, speaking to fellow messy and broken creatures who are trying to live our lives in a messy and broken world.

Friends, are you trusting too much in your own ability to navigate your way through life? In our lives individually and in our lives corporately, what are they marked by? Are they marked by an all-out dependence on me?

Or are they marked by an all-out dependence on the all-sufficiency of God? What? You see, Jesus is asking His disciples this morning, are you praying?

See, check-ups can hurt, but check-ups keep us healthy. Here's the fourth and final question this morning that Jesus asks His disciples. Verse 7, are you serving?

[24 : 50] See, Jesus turns to teach His disciples something about their mindset. And He tells this little parable, doesn't He, about the servant who dutifully does what He's told and a master who just seems to give the orders.

And to us, it might seem that that master is being cold-hearted, but we need to understand to the original listeners how they would have heard this. Because they look at the master giving the orders and that is completely fine, that is completely accepted, that is normal behavior.

But do you see how the servant, the servant is equally behaving as expected? Does he complain? No. Does he try and go for his workers' rights? No. What does he do?

He simply follows his orders. Because he recognizes who he is and he recognizes who his master is. And I think the point is that a good servant, no matter how much work that they do, does it, not for the praise for himself, but does it simply because their master asked.

And I think that's the attitude that Jesus is saying that His disciples, His followers, they need to have. As a response to the outrageous grace that God has shown them, as a response to the outrageous love that has been bestowed upon them by God, we just dutifully serve our master.

[26 : 14] And I wonder, I was thinking about it this week, is the apostles hear this? Is the disciples wrestle with this? I wonder if they're thinking back to the prodigal son. Saw it in chapter 15, didn't we, a few weeks ago.

The prodigal son, what happens? He wanders off and he comes back. And he says, Father, I don't deserve. I'll serve anywhere. Father, I don't deserve. It's the same thing.

Jesus is showing the apostles, his disciples here, that that is exactly what their mindset needs to be. So let me ask you this morning, is that your mindset? In your own heart, as you examine yourself, is there a deep, deep reverence for God?

Is there a still recognition of who he is? Is there an appreciation of his holiness? And I was reminded of that this morning, even driving here.

I don't know if you noticed just the brightness of the sun. I couldn't drive going up Dundas Street. The brightness of the sun. It's almost as if that is God's holiness. And how do we react as we see that?

[27 : 21] Whoa. It's the same thing. Is there a reverence in our heart before our maker? Is there a love for him? Let me ask you, when was the last time you bowed down in your heart before him and said, you are God in heaven and here I am on earth?

What is your response to him as you consider everything that he has done for you? There was an English cricketer called, in fact, sorry, there was an Englishman called C.T. Studd and it was well reported that he was a very talented cricketer.

So much so that it was almost thought that he could have played for England. And instead of trying to go down that route when he became a Christian, instead of trying to go down the cricket route, he actually decided he wanted to be a missionary, decided that he wanted to go the world over telling others about Jesus.

He decided to head for China, gave it all up, says, no, I'm serving the Lord. And he writes this, asked why, why did he do that? He replied, if Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

I mean, we're remembering sacrifices this morning, aren't we? We have to remember the ultimate one, who made a sacrifice for us. Jesus is asking us this morning, are you serving? Are you serving?

[28 : 41] You see, checkups can hurt, but checkups keep us healthy. Holiness and humility. You see, Jesus, he sets a high bar for his disciples.

A high bar. But here's what we need to see as we work towards a close. Jesus isn't asking his disciples here to do anything that he didn't practice himself.

For the one who said, don't sin, he knew no sin. The one that said, forgive, he's on his way to the cross to forgive, to die for the sins of the world, to die for the sins of the very ones who had put him there, to die for the sins of his enemies.

And the one who said, pray, ask for help, pray to God. What did we find him doing in John 17 in the garden? Praying. And the one who said, serve.

He served. All of these things coming together. Look at verse 11. Just let me, let me just touch on next week's sermon. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem and he's on the way to the cross to deal with our sin, to bear our shame so that we could be reconciled to God and by faith in him be included in God's worshiping family.

[29 : 57] Do you see how we're not saved because we obey, but rather it's our absolute delight to obey because we've been saved. Holiness and humility.

Folks, would you pray for me on Tuesday? Dentist? Honestly, dreading it. I'm anticipating sore gums, I'm anticipating sensitive teeth, I'm anticipating a numb mouth so nobody call me Tuesday night.

But checkups can hurt. But checkups keep us healthy. Now we've seen Jesus this morning give his disciples a checkup and we've seen him set a very high bar.

But in doing so do you see the beautiful picture that he's painting of what his people are to be marked by? The true disciple marked by holiness and the true disciple marked by humility.

Let's pray together. And maybe just in the quietness of our own hearts if the Lord has been putting his finger by his spirit on anything in particular in your life this morning maybe just in the quiet maybe just offer up your prayer to God this morning.

[31 : 15] Lord we need you. Oh we need you. Every hour we need you. Our one defence our righteousness oh God how we need you.

And so gracious Father help us this week in everything that we do to live our lives as disciples as followers of your son Jesus Christ who are marked by holiness and who are marked by humility.

Father thank you thank you thank you for all your goodness in Jesus name we ask these things. Amen. season .

It's tight .