

THE MIRACLE NO ONE NOTICES

Luke 6:12–16

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I've called the message from these verses "The Miracle No One Notices."

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor" (Luke 6:12–16, NIV).

If I were to ask you what you felt was the greatest miracle Jesus ever did, you'd probably say the events associated with His death, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven. I think we could all agree that was His greatest miracle. If I were to ask what the second greatest miracle Jesus ever did is, you would probably get a variety of responses. My response would be to point to this particular Scripture here as the second greatest miracle Jesus ever did. That is, the work which He accomplished in changing disciples into apostles; the work which He did in changing followers into leaders. From changing people who walked after Him (the idea of a disciple) to one who was sent out from Him. It took a miracle when He worked with them. And it takes a miracle as He works with us.

Every year Harvard University graduates the cream of intelligencia of America in its graduating classes. The reason why it graduates such bright prospects is that its admissions polices are so rigid. Jesus, however, takes twelve ordinary people one, of them turns out to be a total failure; about C level abilities, as everybody else judges them, and He makes their names and their work famous through the centuries. He did a number on their lives.

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And He does a number on our lives, too, if we let Him. Here, in Luke 6:12–16, we find Jesus laying the foundation for His Church. And to really appreciate what happened in the beginning of the Church, by naming these twelve as apostles, we perhaps ought to take a moment to use our imagination and picture, if Jesus was starting an organization today called “the Church,” how He might go about it using contemporary management models. If I were going about creating something as vast as Jesus has in mind, what would be the normal, standard, operating procedures to get it underway. I would imagine a corporate boardroom with about thirteen people present—the disciples plus Jesus chairing the meeting. Jesus is the chairman of the new corporation, starting out the first meeting by calling it to order. Then saying something like this, “I’ve called you gentlemen here today to assist Me in launching a new enterprise. Of course, you realize how difficult it is to get a new commodity on the market, let alone a new religion. The competition in our field is rather stiff. It’s going to take the best of our resources, ingenuity, and perseverance if we are to be successful.

“First thing that we must do, gentleman, is legally incorporate. The IRS will require us to have a tax ID number, so people can get giving credit on their income tax forms. In California, the Secretary of State will require articles of incorporation and adopted bylaws of governors. We recognize three legal instruments are a prime prerequisite for the establishment of a concern as large as the one we hope to build. I propose we incorporate under the name “Church,” and file for trademark on the term before it becomes a generic term and everybody starts using it. The twelve of you will serve as the board of directors, as well as filling various administrative responsibilities. You will determine policy and implement decision. You will be assigned specific portfolios and, ultimately, have your own geographic territory.

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“Gentlemen, the task before us is enormous. In your lifetime, we expect to establish our corporation of the Church in every country of the world and we expect hundreds of millions of customers. We’ll become the world’s largest multinational enterprise. In addition to attracting vast amounts of people, we must construct several million buildings and find people to staff them. We must also provide ample services to our customers in the form of needed literature and manuals, and I suggest we call the manuals “Bibles.” We also need to create new customs, so that all the various new ethnic and language groups can be bonded to one another through a common ethos; that, in fact, their loyalty to our company will transcend even national and family loyalties.

“Most of you have had no previous administrative experience. I know at least four of you who will have to curb your recreational desires of frequent fishing. All of you must overcome your narrow provincial modes of thinking. I’m adding to the difficulty by making the decision to only serve three years as chief operating officer. Then you’ll have to carry on alone, except My Spirit will be with you.

“Let’s see...here are your areas of general assignment: Thomas, you would be good for this—I suggest you handle public relations for us. You know how to persuade doubting customers. I think your first concern ought to be to create a favorable public image and a high recognition level. Look around for a symbol, which would best epitomize our product for the people. Perhaps Madison Avenue could give you some help with this. You’ll need to overcome the handicap that we don’t have any money to buy advertising.

“J.I., I suggest you handle the finances for our organization. Ultimately we will begin handling significant amounts of money; though, for a while, our operating revenues will be scarce. Be sure

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to set up strict controls to guard against embezzlement and mismanagement. Generate some solid and workable ideas on fundraising. Use some giveaways.

“Matt, act as secretary. Keep minutes of all the meetings and see if you can write a good piece of literature to sell our product.

“Andy, I suggest you head the sales force. You’re always good at getting people interested in coming over to our side, and I think you can invent some ingenious methods of recruitment.

“John, I’d like you to be our deep-thought man, our resident intellectual. Try to protect us from the intellectuals on the other side who will charge that we are naïve. You are fine with the pen and have a ready mind at coining terms based upon household items. Seek to tie us into the masses by giving us a local flavor of universal appeal.

“Pete, you’re a bit impulsive at times but you possess the necessary dynamism to keep things moving. I suggest you master the text on corporation management and prepare to take over in as many areas as you can.

“The rest of you should try to help out in every way possible. I don’t expect things to be easy, but work hard, give it all you’ve got. You’ll make a name for yourselves. Let’s all work together and see what we can accomplish. Meeting adjourned.”

I suppose, if you were beginning an organization, you’d have to do something like that. But Jesus wasn’t beginning an organization. He was beginning an organism, a life-form, a body. They went about breaking all our models of starting new things and announcing five- and ten-year plans and mission statements and everything. Although He had one; he didn’t blow it all off. He starts out by taking a group of people and totally transforming their life. That’s exactly how He’s at work building this church and every church around the world, and His body around the world. He’s using the same principles with us that He used with the Twelve.

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By taking the three passages of Scripture that deal with the calling of the Twelve—Matthew 10, Luke 6, Mark 3—we get a composite of what Jesus actually accomplished in that moment when He summoned these people to Himself and named them “apostles.” I’d like to look at five principles Jesus used in this moment of laying the foundation of His kingdom. Five transferable principles of how He’s working in our life.

I. The first that has to be noted is that everything that has power and impact in the kingdom of God is birthed in prayer.

Nothing significant ever happens in God’s Church or in His kingdom when there is no prayer. That certainly is the case here with the call of the Twelve. Flipping over to the Matthew 10, we find that the call for the Twelve is noted there, but if you back up one paragraph to the end of chapter 9, beginning with verse 25, you find that Jesus, before He called the Twelve—the day before He called them—was looking at the masses of people and said they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And He said to the disciples, “Pray, therefore, to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the harvest; for the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.” Then picking up with Luke 6, “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them” (Luke 6:12-13, NIV).

Two things should be noticed:

One is that when Jesus told people to pray, He Himself prayed and He prayed intensively. The product of His prayer is the placement of leadership in His church. There ought never to be leadership placed in the church, there ought never to be anything significant done in our lives personally or in the kingdom of God corporately, unless it is birthed in prayer. Jesus prayed. I have a theory (I can’t prove this from Scripture) as to who made the final cut. Jesus had a lot of

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disciples, but He only chose twelve. I wonder if those twelve weren't chosen with the idea that Jesus—the day before—had said, “Pray.” I wonder if He didn't observe that at least these twelve didn't set up some kind of a prayer and make themselves available.

It's interesting that Jesus defined the problem of growth in His kingdom—not being that there aren't enough people who want the gospel He brings, not with a lack of hungry people—as being a shortage of workers. He said that there would be many who would come, but there weren't enough to take care of them and to minister to them, so you need to pray that there will be workers in the harvest. As a person who's had fourteen years of pastoral experience in this church, I would say that my experience is right on with what Jesus is saying there. There is no shortage of people who are hungry for God, if they can know where to get the bread. The problem always is in the shortage of workers: the people who have talked themselves out of being a worker because they don't feel qualified or competent, the people who put other priorities in their life rather than the priority of at least being plugged into one meaningful area and avenue of ministry, the people who have prematurely retired from prayer and from ministry of one kind or another to the world and to one another in the body. Jesus says to His disciples, “If I can get you to pray, then you'll catch the burden.” It's praying people who get burdens. And burdened people are the ones who go out and do something and recognize, as they go do it, that only the power of the Holy Spirit can equip us to do what God is burdening for us to do in prayer.

This little aspect, that Christ spent all night in prayer, is a reminder to us that, before every key decision in our life, we need to pray and pray intensively about it and make sure we're in God's will in doing it. And we need to make it a continual prayer request that God will send workers into His harvest and that there will always be plenty of people to adequately minister to all the

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needs that the Lord wants to minister to through this church, through His body, through us.

Everything that has lasting power and impact in the kingdom of God is always birthed in prayer.

II. The second lesson to come out of this particular passage of Scripture is that a disciple is a called person whose first priority is their relationship with Jesus.

The New Testament talks a great deal about the fact that we didn't call ourselves. He called us.

Some people get all hung up theologically on that. The fact that He called us means He didn't

call someone else. I think we need to take it in the spiritual, psychological sense. The fact that

Jesus calls us means that, for every one of us, we can say the Lord wanted us as His follower. He

calls us. Therefore, if there are any mistakes, He's made them in calling us. But He didn't make a

mistake when He called you and me to follow Him, or when He called you or me to work in a

specific area of His kingdom, He didn't make a mistake in calling us. In calling us, Mark 3 says

that the dimensions of the disciple's call has three aspects: the first is that He called them to be

with Him; the second is that He called them to preach, and the third is that He called them to cast

out demons and also to heal the sick. To be with him, to preach and to do mighty works in His

name—the three calls of a disciple.

That Scripture sort of lay there for years in my life, until, a little over fourteen years ago, I

learned of the death of my friend in Vietnam. We had lived in the same dormitory at college as

students. He was the only Assemblies of God chaplain to ever lose his life in any war. He left

behind his wife and three young children. I was asked to go and be one of the speakers at his

funeral in Montana. It was just before I came here as pastor. So, representing Evangel College, I

went wondering what I was going to say. As I was en route and reading my Bible on the plane,

this Scripture from Mark 3 and Luke 6 leaped out at me. The fact is that Jesus, when He called

us, gave us a priority call and that call was to be with Him. The secondary call was to speak for

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Him and to act or do things for Him. I realized that the second and third aspects of our call are limited to time and earth, not eternity and heaven. We will not preach in heaven. There's no need for preachers in heaven—everybody's already saved. There are no demons to cast out in heaven. And there are no sick people to be healed in heaven, because everybody's well. So the second and third dimensions of the disciple's call to speak for Christ and to work for Christ are gone. But the dimension that endures is the dimension to be with Him. And that, to be with Him, is His option to call: to be with Him now, to be with Him forever. But it's a call to be with Him. Discipleship, therefore, has as its priority to be with Jesus. The more you're with a person, the more you know how they think and how they react.

Jewel and I were talking yesterday. This anniversary, in December, we'll be married twenty years. We can absolutely read one another's reactions. I know the things that get Jewel upset and she knows what gets me upset. It's amazing living with a person you can predict. You know them. You know their mind.

Jesus is saying, "Come be with Me because, in being with Me and listening to Me and seeing how I live life, not only will I cause you to be with Me, but I will then be in you so that you will live life with Me in you and you will be in Me." We will be in life together with Him. So discipleship involves Jesus changing us by being with us. And to say, "Oh, that I might know Him; not in the intellectual sense, but the relational sense. That I might know Him more and more."

A little girl got confused with the word "disciples" that her Sunday school teacher was using. It seemed like, evidently, the word was coming out like "siples." The front enunciation was being dropped. The little girl was a little bit confused with what the teacher taught that morning because, when she came home to her parents and they said, "What was the Sunday School lesson

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about today?” she said, “It was about Jesus and the samples.” That’s exactly what He’s doing with the Twelve—Jesus and the samples. And what He seeks to do with us, as we follow Him, is for us to be with Him.

III. A third lesson coming out of this is, when Jesus calls us to Himself, He simultaneously calls us to other people.

In joining Him, we join the company He has gathered. It’s instructive to note that when Jesus called people to walk after Him, He didn’t start out with just one person. His first call was for two—Andrew and John. When Andrew began following Him, he followed Jesus in the company of John. He couldn’t say, “Lord, I’ll follow You but forget John. We never got along anyway.” And John couldn’t do that with Andrew. As when He begins to collect the other people, they can’t say, “Jesus I’d love to follow You, but the people You’ve got in your group... I don’t know about that group.”

Can you imagine Thomas and Peter in the same group? Thomas the doubter and Peter the optimist; Thomas the pessimist—Peter the believer. In John 11, Jesus says, “I’m going to go see Lazarus.” Thomas knows that, if He gets close to Jerusalem, it’s dangerous. So Thomas, very sardonically, says, “Let us go also, that we may die with Him.” A real positive person in every group! Every group needs somebody like that. But put Peter on a boat in a storm at sea and have Jesus come walking over the water, and Peter just can’t wait to jump out of the boat and try it himself. Every group needs somebody like that. Let’s go! Those two together...they have to live with one another.

Then there is Simon the Zealot and Matthew Levi the tax collector. The Zealot...another word for that is “terrorist.” Zealots were terrorists. They believe in assassinating people secretly. If they’d had bombs in those days, they’d been blowing people up in front of embassies. But they

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used daggers instead. That was the best weapon they had. Overthrow the Romans! And Matthew Levi was a tax collector for the Romans. A Jew turned renegade, turned Benedict Arnold. They were in the same group.

A dynamic mix of people. The Church of Jesus Christ is like that. Look around and you are going to find people who aren't like yourself; people that will irritate you to no end. I think we ought to make sure that we have voluntarily chosen to let at least one person in our inner circle of life who aggravates us to no end. You'll never grow if you don't have that. The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of a tremendous, diverse group of people. Perhaps in American culture, because of the variety of churches, we have a sense of what body I'm going to be involved in. In every body there's going to be a mixture. The Church of Jesus Christ ought to seek to be as broad and as wide and as inclusive as Jesus is Himself. I believe that the local church of Jesus Christ ought to try everything within its power to be a microcosm of the true universal Church that, within it, ought to have ethnic and racial individualities, middle-class, welfare, wealthy, laborers and intellectuals, men and women, single and married, young and old. What makes us Christians is not the social category we belong to, but our common relationship to Jesus Christ. Every local body ought to have a smattering of people from all kinds of religious traditions and backgrounds, from Assemblies of God to Catholics and Methodists and Presbyterians and nondenominational to "I never went to church in my life." The body of Jesus Christ ought to be that large and that inclusive.

Years ago, when I started out to explain this kind of idea and share this with the church, I was waxing eloquent on the fact that the church was a microcosm and Jesus calls us to one another and not just to Himself and, in that call, there's diversity and, in the local church, we ought to see that kind of diversity, not just try to be all one type and all be like one another and then we can

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be free to be ourselves. I was explaining how people, regardless of their denominational backgrounds or any other kind of background, were welcome in the body of Christ here. My son, at the time, was about five or six year of age and came up to me after the service. He was sort of radiating. He said, “Dad, I’ve got it!” I said, “What have you got?” To understand what he told me, you have to know that his favorite place in the church was the balcony. That, for him, was the best seat in the house. He said, “Let’s call the balcony the KG balcony.” Not knowing what “KG” stood for, I asked. He said, “It’s for the Catholics and the Gews, so they’ll have the best seats in the house.” The church is an inclusive community. We’re trying to bring people to Christ, not trying to drive them away from Christ.

When Jesus calls us to Himself, He simultaneously calls us to others. Simon the zealot and Matthew discovered that. He breaks aside those human barriers and unites us. He’s the “uniter.”

IV. The fourth thing we learn, out of this particular text, is that every company of Jesus has, within it, the failure of a Judas or the potential of a failure of a Judas.

It’s a mystery to me why Jesus chose Judas. Scripture makes it very plain that Jesus knew Judas would betray Him. Although it’s interesting, when Judas finally betrays Him, Judas never lays the blame on Jesus. “Jesus, You tricked me when You called me...” Judas says in Matthew 27:4 “I have sinned.” Judas takes responsibility. He doesn’t blame it on Jesus. That’s the bottom line on Judas. Judas finally comes to recognize his own responsibility.

But there was one of twelve—that 83 percent of the company of Jesus has within it the potential of Judas. As a matter of fact, in the Upper Room where Jesus was having communion for the first time with His disciples, they all recognized they had a little Judas within them because they kept saying, “Is it I?” One actually did it. Everybody knew it was possible.

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That means that this morning, preaching to over twelve hundred people at two worship services, there are over a hundred people who for sure have the Judas potential. That's fifty people in each service which will deny Christ and walk away from Him. I'm staggered at that. And like the disciples, I say too, "Is it I?"

Why did Judas walk away from Jesus? I think there are some major reasons the Gospels provide as to why a person with Judas potential walks away. Two key things:

A. One is, Judas did not deal with his disappointments in Jesus. Judas became disappointed with Jesus, because Jesus was not acting like Judas wanted Jesus to act. Judas wanted Jesus to be a political Messiah, a king. That's his mentality. When Jesus didn't do what Judas had in mind, Judas got disillusioned. There are a lot of people who have a lot of false expectations of what Jesus is going to do—Jesus is going to make me rich, Jesus is going to make everything work out and I'm never going to have any problems or anything like that. Then, when Jesus doesn't come through and we have a major setback in our life, we say, "Jesus failed me. He let me down." Judas didn't deal with the true definition that Jesus was giving of Himself.

B. The second thing that Judas didn't deal with was the moral sin and failure in his own life. John says that he was a thief and he regularly stole from the apostolic purse; from the treasury that they had in their traveling band. He took from the expense account.

If you go on letting sin accumulate in your life and not dealing with it, you become capable of more and more things that are wrong until you wind up like Judas, with an apostate heart and a reprobate mind. Judas did not deal with those two things in his life. As a result, when it all came down and Christ died and Judas recognized that he'd betrayed Him and felt bad about that, in a moral and ethical sense, Judas didn't hang around long enough to let Jesus appear to him. That

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was his last mistake. I think Jesus would have forgiven Judas, just like He forgave Peter, but Judas checked out before getting to Jesus.

There's hope for people with Judas potential to get to Jesus. Don't check out before He has the chance to forgive you. Then, when He forgives you, you won't want to check out. But within every company of Jesus, there is the Judas potential, and with every one of our lives, there is that potential. We need to guard against it.

V. The fifth thing about this passage is that every company of Jesus is made up of people of varying levels of ability and potential.

There are four listings of the Twelve apostles in the New Testament. The first is in Matthew 10, the second is in Mark 3, the third is in Luke 6 and the fourth is Acts 1. If you take the lists and compare them to one another, and not just line them out, you'll find that Simon Peter is always number one, Philip is always number five, and James, the son of Alphaeus, is always number nine, and Judas is always number twelve. They are the only four that are always in the same position. After Peter, there is a group of three. They are always two, three and four, although not always in that order—James, John, and Andrew. And after Philip, there's another group of three: numbers six, seven and eight. Not always in that order, but always within that category—Thomas, Matthew, and Bartholomew. Then after James, the son of Alphaeus, the tenth and eleventh position, although sometimes interchanged, are Thadeus, and Simon the Zealot. Thadeus is also called Judas, the son of James.

What's instructive about that is that the top four are the famous ones. The next four are ones that are not so famous, but we immediately recognize them. We know about Matthew and Thomas and Bartholomew and Philip. The last four we know zilch about, except Judas Iscariot. Three

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levels of potential—high potential: the first four; average potential: the second four; and low potential: the third four.

I'm convinced that every company of Jesus has that kind of a breakdown. One of the great freeing things in our life is when we can come to a God-accepted, sober, and sane understanding of our lives to find out where we fit and whether we're living up to that. For years, I tried to live outside my category, and I still try to do that every once in a while. That brings all kinds of frustration into my life. I am a low level or average level potential in the ministry. I'm not just saying that. To me, the high-achievers in pastoral ministry are people like Chuck Smith, Chuck Swindoll, Jack Hayford, Bob Schuller—I have an immense respect for all these people whom God is using to touch thousands and thousands of people. I'll live my life in frustration if I go around saying, "I'm not Chuck Smith... I'm not Chuck Swindoll... I'm not Jack Hayford..." If I try to live up to those kinds of ministries, then I'll never have a ministry of my own because I'm too busy comparing myself to the other categories.

I had a person come up to me after the eight-thirty service with a joyful expression on her face. She said, "After the service, I had a vision. One of the problems in my life has been the fact that people are always forcing me to do more than I thought I was capable of doing for the Lord. I always went around with guilt that I wasn't doing enough. Suddenly, as we were praying at the end of the service, I had a vision of sitting at the end of the table. I was at the last place of the table and I felt, for the first time, that it was ok to be at the end of the table. I felt at home. I was ok. It was fine to be at the foot of the table, sitting. In my vision, Jesus Himself came and stood with me and said it was ok."

The key is to be all you can be in the range of callings and gifts God has called you to.

Promotion is up to Him to make. But it's up to us to be faithful.

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A tremendous thing about relating what's in Luke 6 with what's in Revelation 21. In Revelation 21, you have the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. The Church pictured symbolically as a building. Four walls and, under each wall, is the foundation. Each of the foundation stones are the apostles. Since the city is totally symmetrical, all the sides are the same, it must be that all the foundation stones are as well. Each stone has the names of the Twelve apostles, which from God's point of view, even though the group was divided into three categories of potential, from heaven's point of view, they're all the same size. Peter is not bigger than Bartholomew and Bartholomew's stone is not larger than Simon the zealot's. They all have an equal space in the kingdom to come, because the Lord bases recognition not so much on outward notoriety and fame, but upon faithfulness and upon living up to what God has called you to do, not what He's called somebody else to do.

I hope that little dimension of discipleship is a freeing thing in your life. The miracle no one sees is the change He is making in His people. The change He is making over a process of time in you and in me. That's the second greatest miracle of Jesus.

Some reflective questions as we close:

Are you praying about your part in Jesus' central concern? His central concern is the harvest.

Are you praying about what was very near to Him? Praying the Lord sends laborers for the harvest? If you're not now, start praying about that. Make it a matter of daily prayer: "Lord, what do You want me to do about the harvest?" He'll show you what to do. I have no doubt about that. He'll lay something on your heart.

Is your first priority your relationship with Him? Where does that fit with the other priorities in your life?

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Are you receiving and becoming committed to others in the company of Jesus? Don't try to live the Christian life as a Lone Ranger. Get plugged in with other believers.

Have you, and do you, continue to deal with the Judas in your life? Deal with the disappointments you feel you've had in Jesus. Deal with moral failure in your own life and bring it to the Lord and get it confessed and get it dealt with.

Are you committed to serving Jesus to the full level of your abilities? Finding your place and serving Him within that place with all your heart.

It's unbelievable what the Lord will do as we see these kinds of things take place in our life and answer questions in the way He wants.

Closing Prayer

Lord, may we, like the disciples, be people who are changed by You. These people had no idea what You were going to wind up doing with them. They just followed Your call in obedience that one day and let You declare to them what they were going to be—Apostles. Little did they realize all that was involved; but because they put their lives as a yielded vessel in Your hands, You did wonderful things through them. And Lord, there's no exception today to that same work because You're the living Lord, still reigning through Your Church, alive in us, calling us today, summoning us and saying, "I've got an appointment for you. Will you take it? I'm going to work through you. I'm going to change you for the better. Will you follow Me and let Me change you?" Lord, I pray especially for people in this service today in whom an aspect of this message about Judas really touched a sensitive spiritual nerve in their life. Rather than walking away like Judas, I pray that they would walk toward You and be open with You and not hide from You or play games with You; but really be authentic with You and find You as the One who faithfully restores, forgives. And Lord, each of us have varying levels of ability. Help us to be true to the

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level of ability that we have. That we, collectively, as a church, might be for the honor and glory of God. Save us from the game of comparing ourselves with one another or judging our success or failure by someone else's spirituality. Just make us like You. Let us be content to be with You. Thank you, Lord. In Christ's name. Amen.