

# Simple Faith

◆ **December 23** ◆  
(Christmas Sunday)

## “Order Our Steps”

*Faith helps us put sacred order into our lives*

Matthew 2:13-15

### Introduction

History has never witnessed a time in which the advancement of technology has so primed a generation for travel. It's so easy to book a flight, to get the best rate on a hotel room, or compare five different car rental companies for the best weekly rental right from the convenience of our smart phone. How many of you remember a time when travel wasn't as easy? Some of you won't remember this, but AAA used to print trip booklets that would give you turn by turn directions, complete with road construction detours and places to eat. All you would have to do is dial (yes dial) a phone to your local AAA storefront on a Monday and five days later, you could pick up your trip document.

Today, with Garmin, Maps, Apps, and Wayz one only needs a few minutes to prepare for any journey. This morning, I want to talk about a different type of journey. It's not a journey taking you to a destination like Grandma's house or a weekend at the beach. Instead, I want to chat about a spiritual journey—and this trek is amazing. It offers a simple faith practices that allows God to order our steps so that our journey becomes sacred.

Doesn't that sound refreshing? It is!

Read Text:

*“(13) When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ (14) So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, (15) where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” Matthew 2:13-15*

As we read, Joseph is warned in a dream to take Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt. Herod realized he has been hoodwinked and is preparing to search for the baby and to kill Jesus. That is quite a warning that comes to Jesus through an angel.

I have a warning today as well. It's not a warning about the physical safety of your children or yourself. But it is a warning for your emotional safety. It's a warning for your physical well-being. My warning would sound like this: *In the midst of these next 48 hours, please find a few moments to bring sacred order to your life.*

We have been talking the last several weeks about Simple Faith. Don't think for a moment that bringing sacred order to your life is difficult. The last thing I want to do is to add to your list of things to do a few days before Christmas.

But this message is so important for us this morning. I am inviting you to practice the presence of God so that you won't miss the sacred moments of Christmas. I am going to give you a few very simple faith disciplines that will bring extraordinary results to your Christmas. The extraordinary results of Joseph's simple faith resulted in the survival of the baby Jesus. The extraordinary results of your simple faith mean that you can have a fresh faith and an experience in the presence of God.

### **Faith Disciplines**

In her book, *Walking a Sacred Path*, Lauren Artress suggests three disciplines of experiencing the presence of God. I want to take those three disciplines and help us bring a divine order to life. Here are the three: purging, illumination, and communion. That's the simple list that I want you to embrace at some point in the next 48 hours.

#### **One: Purging.**

Someone once said that once a month every follower of Christ should go through a divine detox. This is a moment of complete surrender to God. All the worry, anxiety, frustration, fear, doubt or even despair about life is emptied. I want you, sometime during these next few days to take a moment to experience divine detox.

Having a sacred order in our life is about people and process, not the pace or the results. Here's one thing I have noticed every Christmas season: people tend to make it about the pace and the results—and it leaves us empty.

*Illustration (insert your own illustration highlighting how busyness doesn't result in a real experience of Christmas): A few years ago, I was determined to experience everything I could during Christmas: baking, Christmas cards, saving Christmas cards, decorating inside and outside, attending every party, driving around and seeing Christmas lights, experiencing civic Christmas plays and musicals. I didn't want to miss one thing. It was the worse experience! I made it about the pace and programs, while the people around me suffered. It wasn't about the process of the experiencing Christmas. That's a year that I remember being tired, grumpy, and empty.*

Will you in the next few days, take a time and walk through a divine detox. The goal is to empty yourself of all that is detouring you from experiencing the presence of Christ. Here's how you do this.

The goal is to lay down those burdens producing weight and stress in your life. I know for me, I need a moment of silence to focus my thoughts. For most of us, this likely means we wake up early or stay up a little later than the rest of the family. In these few moments of stillness, we sit before the Father, breathing in His grace and peace, while exhaling the worry and tension facing us. Let me give you a couple of examples of how I sometimes do this.

Example 1: "I breathe in His presence and exhale my "To Do List." As I do, I speak the words of Psalm 23 and slowly rest on common words or phrases like, "he leads me beside still waters."

Example 2: I purge tension from my life by thinking about a hymn or song like, "Here's my heart Lord.... Here's my heart Lord, speak what is true." I say or even sing these words and they provide solace and spiritual release for me.

Here's the power of this experience for me: I can actually feel a deep calm come over me. My fist is less clinched, my breathing slows, I feel relaxed, and I am strangely ready for a new day. I don't know what your experience will 'feel' like, but you will know when it happens.

Are you getting the picture? To purge is an act of unloading or unpacking, even if it's for a moment in order that you experience a moment of peace. Doesn't that sound nice?

It's like the old gospel song, "I'm gonna lay down my burdens, down by the riverside." This is what I am asking you to do.

### **Two: Illumination.**

Illumination comes from the Latin word, *lumen*, meaning light. After a moment of purging, or divine detox, center your thoughts on a Bible verse or an attribute of God. Ask God to increase your awareness of its depth.

Recently, I focused on the words the angel spoke to Mary: "Nothing is impossible with God." That was it—just those five simple words. I simply thought about all the impossible things in my life at that moment. What are the seemingly impossible things in your life? Maybe it seems impossible that your job will get better. Perhaps it is a relationship that has suffered this year and you want it to be healed. It might be getting rid of debt or finishing a degree. It might be preparing for Christmas dinner since you have a mountain of other things to do as well.

The more I pondered the thought, "nothing is impossible with God," the more my faith was being built. I literally felt the junk purged from life was being replaced by words and thoughts of strength. It was as if my emotional and spiritual cup had been emptied and Jesus was filling it with something fresh and good and pleasing. It was a true moment of faith building for me. God became bigger and my impossible became smaller.

### **Three: Communion.**

This spiritual discipline is my favorite, because after the purging and after the moments of illumination, sacred order is experienced, and I commune with God. It's the journey of the first two steps that teach us how to experience the sacred order of our life.

It's enjoying the moment of communion with God. I have to confess there are times when I don't feel like beginning my time with God. Of course, it has nothing to do with God. He is faithful. He is good. He is ready. It has to do with what is happening in my life. Do I have time? Do I feel like journaling? Am I going to stay awake? Despite my moments of weakness, once the purging takes place and I begin to hear from God through the scriptural process of illumination, I receive the benefit of the presence of God. There is nothing like communing with God.

Our experience of the presence of God dovetails with the closing words of the hymn, *In The Garden*: "and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known." This is what it feels like in the very presence of God. It's so fulfilling and one begins to think nobody could ever feel this way.

## **Conclusion**

Friends, bringing sacred order to our life isn't difficult. The spiritual disciplines of purging, illumination, and communion put us in the middle of something bigger than ourselves, something holier and heavier. When Christ becomes the center, only then do we experience the sacred order of our life.

The Christmas movie this week is the classic flick entitled, "It's a Wonderful Life." As we watch the life of George Bailey unfold, we see a man who is clearly missing sacred order. His plans have been thwarted by

everything from the death of his father to the Great Depression. He doesn't like his job, even though he knows he helps others. He knows his wife is beautiful and his children are great, but they doesn't seem like enough. He is filled with anxiety and clearly missing sacred order.

Life for George Bailey is chaotic and perhaps today, you feel like yours is as well. As a matter of fact, it wouldn't take much more stress or unhappiness to tip the scales in your life. Friends, I want you to know that life doesn't have to be focused on unmet expectations, disappointments, or lack of money. You are capable of bringing sacred order to your life just like George Bailey did realizing, that "though we live much of our lives from the outside, the deeper impact of what happens is registered in the narratives of the heart. (Poet John O'Donohue)

The real lesson of "It's a Wonderful Life" is that what we think we want out of life and how our days are spent, are not nearly as important as what God is doing within you. So, let him do that work of bringing sacred order into your life.

If the final batch of fudge is not finished or a few gifts are missing bows, no one will even notice. But they will notice someone that has taken a journey with Jesus and has purged the stresses and frustrations; they will notice someone that has taken time to let the Word speak to them. A person that has communed with God will be as filled with joy as George Bailey was, when he burst into his home, singing, celebrating with friends, and embracing his family. That will be someone that has spent time with Jesus.