

SERIES Four Chairs of Discipleship  
 SERMON **Newbie's Recliner (Luke 9.57–62)**  
 PASTOR Carl S. Sweatman  
 LOCATION Church of Christ at Manor Woods (Rockville, MD)  
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—PRAY—

## 1. GOOD INTENTIONS

Back in the early-/mid-70s, there was a noticeable shift in how churches went about “doing church.” It seemed to be a reactive measure to address culture’s growing negativity toward Christianity—esp. with the tensions over authority and morality (*i.e.*, *God defines what is right, good, true, and pure vs. man is the measure of all things*)—along with the negative effect this had on church attendance. More and more people were drifting away from the church as an integral and worthwhile part of their lives. Also, as one reporter essentially summarized it: the euphoric high of post-WW2 victory and prosperity—when the country got back to “normal”—began to wear off and people readjusted their priorities and even their faith-commitments.

Some of this resulted in church-hopping (*and even denomination-hopping*), less meaningful participation, less attendance, and even full departure. (*Nothing new under the sun*). So as a reaction to this drifting away, along with a growing loss of basic culturally shared-knowledge of biblical ideas and principles, a “new” way of doing church emerged. It became known as the “seeker-sensitive” movement. In fact, one church in Illinois built its entire ministry on this approach, and, over time, became the model for doing seeker-sensitive church. They began by asking non-believers, “**What is it that you don’t like about church?**” as well as asking discouraged believers, “**What is it that caused you to move away from the church?**” and then they designed and tailored their way of doing ministry around those answers.

They created all sorts of programs, outreach events, worship experiences (*which included drama, music, video, dance, etc*),<sup>1</sup> and easy-on-the ears teaching about the Bible so as to land as many butts-in-seats as possible. All of this done with the hopes of being “relevant” to the culture, and thus appealing to it. And alongside this was the underlying assumption: “**If we can get people re-interested in the church and get the numbers back up to where they were, then we’re doing gospel ministry.**” One upside was its apparent rapid success—not just in the one church that championed it but also in other churches around the country who adopted the same approach. And this effect seemed to flourish for the next 20+ years. But there was a downside, and unfortunately only a few recognized it and did something about it. And one of the first to see it was the one church who championed it. So, what’s the downside? Simple.

When the goal is to get uninterested unbelievers interested in church, by offering a “relevant” and un-offending gospel message, and singing a bunch of feel-good “Jesus is my boyfriend” type songs, then the necessary and God-given task of helping seekers become believers who deepen their faith stays on the shelf. Thus, while these churches could attract mass numbers of seekers, and have staggering numbers of people claiming Christ and placing membership, they struggled to keep them. In fact, the Illinois church admitted: in the early 90s (*i.e.*, *after*

<sup>1</sup> See B. Donahue & R. Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups* (Zondervan, 2005), 11.

nearly 20 years of doing seeker-sensitive ministry), they had 12–15,000 people attending (they called them members), but only c.2000 were actively pursuing ways to deepen their faith. And that's when the reality hit hard: they struggled to keep new people because they confused discipleship with evangelism. They let claims of belief and membership define the scope, purpose, and success of what it means to become and live as a faithful, growing disciple.

Moreover, there was little in place to help people move beyond the initial attraction of faith and into a life of ongoing spiritual development and faithful service. There was a neglect in teaching people how to read and study the Bible effectively and appropriately. In helping people learn how to pray faithfully and selflessly. In training people how to engage with and use the spiritual disciplines. And in showing people how to live as Christ's representatives in the world, especially representatives who desire to fulfill the great commission of making disciples of all nations. All told: there was a neglect in fulfilling Christ's call of discipleship. And while it might not have been immediately recognized, such a neglect is the inevitable result of wanting to present a "relevant" and un-offending gospel experience. Where the focus is on appealing superficially to others, rather than deeply submitting to Christ.

Building on the principle of "what you win people with is what you win them to," pastor Paul Carter observed: "If you sell them on Christianity Lite then you need to continue to offer Christianity Lite week after week after week."<sup>2</sup> Or as John Stott pointed out: "sermonettes breed Christianettes."<sup>3</sup> And it shouldn't take much to realize that this way of doing things simply does not show people how to own and deepen their faith in Christ, and it does not equip them with ways to strengthen that faith so as to be able to stand firm in the face of opposition from the world. And for the past 25+ years, we've been seeing and experiencing the effects (and dare I say consequences) of this way of "doing church." And unsurprisingly, what we're seeing is not only not good, but also not consistent with Jesus' expectations for what it means to "be the church." Pastor Kyle Idleman summarize it well when he said:

"I think Jesus has a lot of fans these days. Fans who cheer for him when things are going well, but who walk away when it's a difficult season. Fans who sit safely in the stands cheering, but they know nothing of the sacrifice and pain on the field. Fans of Jesus who know all about him, but they don't *know* him. But Jesus was never interested in having fans. When he defines what kind of relationship he wants, 'Enthusiastic Admirer' isn't an option. My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in truly following him. The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren't actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them."<sup>4</sup>

And once again, that's not what Jesus has in mind for true, faithful disciples. Remember, He implicitly spoke against that type of commitment in the parable of the sower. The seed that fell on the rocky ground sprang up quickly but was easily lost, because of shallow soil and an insufficient or weak root-system. Or as He explains: it's "the person who hears the word and

<sup>2</sup> P. Carter, "Why I Abandoned Seeker-Church" (TGC Online, 23-Aug-2018—[found here](#)).

<sup>3</sup> J.R.W Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Eerdmans, 2017), 230.

<sup>4</sup> K. Idleman, *Not a Fan* (Zondervan, 2011), 25.

immediately receives is with joy. But he has no root in himself and does not endure; when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away” (Mt 13.20–21). Moreover, He told the disciples that following Him comes with a price of self-sacrifice...daily. And those unwilling to make that level of commitment are unworthy to be called His disciple.

However, those who are willing to make the daily self-sacrificing commitment expected for faithful discipleship; they are the ones who are able to move from being mere fans of Jesus (*who are basically the same as they were before, but just with a bobble-head-Buddy-Jesus on their dashboards*) to being His true followers (*whose hearts and lives have been changed and who have been clothed with the eternal Savior and Lord*). And they are the ones who have not only the assurance of His unshakeable foundation, upon which the new life He gives is to be built, but also His unyielding promise of a life of blessing beyond imagination—even when it seems like the blessed life is non-existent. Check out the Beatitudes in Mt 5.2–12 for that.

But when the life of faith is faithfully lived, and when true disciples are truly committed to the call and cost of true discipleship, they will be able to know that—despite any and all storms in this life—the blessedness of the new life in Christ greatly surpasses all else. An all-surpassing life that will require an eternity to fathom, enjoy, and worship God for graciously providing it. And when this faithful commitment characterizes the identity, behavior, life, and purpose of true disciples, we find such people eagerly striving to uphold Jesus’ expectations for what it means to be His church, built on His foundation, constructed by His design, and maintained according to His standard. As pastor J. Mack Stiles reminds us: **“The church is called to be a cross-centered, gospel-focused, God-glorifying community to the praise of Christ. We cannot forget that the aim of the church is set on Jesus as the Christ, not seekers and their comfort.”**<sup>5</sup>

## **2. AWARE OF THE DIFFERENCE(S)**

And that sets us up for the focus of this morning. We need to be aware of the call upon the church to be the difference in the world that Christ expects us to be. And we need to be aware of the transition from unbelief to belief as well as the need for new believers to know how to grow, take ownership of their faith, and serve alongside other believers. But the awareness cannot remain mere awareness; it needs to generate meaningful action on the parts of all who have been made new in Christ. For this morning, our concern is with the new believer and helping them realize they are welcome and they are a vital part of the church. But they (*along with everyone else, for that matter*) are not called to be passive spectators who enjoy life in the “newbie recliner.” The “second chair” in the process of discipleship.

Now, why use a “recliner” for the imagery? I think that answer is pretty easy. Who doesn’t like a good, cozy recliner, where once you’re in it, everything else fades into the background? When that feeling or experience is applied to how churches tried to do church, it’s easy to see how the recliner becomes an appropriate illustration. It’s the throne so-often promised by those faithful to a seeker-sensitive approach to ministry. It’s the place where new believers are invited to come in, kick back, relax, switch off the mind, and enjoy the entertainment. It’s the place where there are no commitments to get actively involved and certainly no sacrifices of one’s personal comforts or lifestyle. Just sit there and be cozy. Thus, and as studies have shown, it’s no wonder that a large percentage of Christians today want to remain in this chair. And while we know this needs to change, we also know it’s an existing mentality to address.

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<sup>5</sup> J.M. Stiles, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* (Crossway, 2014), 87.

### a. Know the Characteristics

Thus, as disciples who make disciples, and earnestly want to see others grow and mature in their faith, we need to be able to spot new believers (*especially those drawn to the “newbie recliner”*) and to recognize where they’re at in their understanding of the new life in Christ. And from that recognition, we’ll be able to help guide them farther along their discipleship journey. So that raises the question: how we do identify a newbie? One basic thing to keep in mind is: “newbie” does not always mean young or even new to the church. Many of these can be mature in age (*shall we say*), and many are often long-standing members of a church. Thus, biological age and length of membership are not sufficient guides for defining maturity of faith. We need something more. A more that’s often revealed through conversations and the building of relationships. And it’s in those interactions that we find the clues that show us we’re engaging with a new believer. Let me give you four general ones.

First, there will be a type of “innocent ignorance”—meaning a limited knowledge simply because of their newness to the faith. This can be things like knowledge about the Bible (e.g., *the unified story it tells, its structure, how it came to be, its reliability*); basic doctrines (e.g., *God, Christ, Spirit, sin, salvation, end-times—with that last one not being informed by popular alarmist books or a Scofield Reference Bible*); Christian life and practices (e.g., *a new morality, communion, offering, serving*); or even church membership (e.g., *what it is, what it means, how it looks, why it’s necessary*). Now we should point out: while this “ignorance” is often innocent (*i.e., the person doesn’t mean to be*), there will be occasions when it is willful—*i.e., the new believer has no desire to engage with such things, let alone remedy the ignorance*.

Second, there will be various forms of confusion. Here we might see them wrestle with things like old frustrations or hang-ups still vying for attention (e.g., *worldly or pre-Christian views about the church or faith*); an inner imbalance (e.g., *too much weight given to subjective feelings as definers of truth and reality, or perceptions being more meaningful than reality*); unhealthy expectations (e.g., *“I’m a Christian now, so why am I struggling?”*, or *“why do I still have questions and even doubts?”*, or *“why is the rest of the world not understanding what’s so simple?”*); or even identity formation (e.g., *how to let go of the ways of the world and embrace the ways of Christ*). All of these things are characteristic of the early stages of faith, and they each require different kinds of help and guidance from those who are in later stages. Thus, there is a need within the church for those who have been farther down the road (*who remember/know what it’s like*) to come back and walk with those who are just getting started.

Third, and this is probably the darkest of the four: there will be varying degrees of pride and self-focus. A highly me-centered view of faith. This often appears in the form of a sense of entitlement (e.g., *expectation of being catered to, not overburdened, not asked to do anything uncomfortable*), insisting on one’s own way (*i.e., Christianity on one’s own terms or based on one’s opinions and preferences*), complaining if things don’t go one’s way (*that one is self-explanatory, and it often engages in a behind-the-scenes recruitment of others to help champion the gripe*), resisting or rejecting criticism (*i.e., the “don’t judge me” crowd, or the “everyone’s opinion is equally valid” supporters*), or even serving only to reward the self (e.g., *“I’ll volunteer, but what do I get out of it?”*).

Unfortunately, much of this comes from a faulty understanding of what the church is—not to mention a disciple. And that faulty understanding exists because the mind and heart are far

more influenced by the consumerist mentality in our culture—especially as it relates everyday life, including church and faith. And an illustration of this is what Thom Rainer has called, “**serial church-hopping.**”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the prideful, self-focused newbie will often say: “If ‘church A’ is not satisfying my wants, expectations, or even my requirements, then I’ll just leave and go to ‘church B,’ who promises that they will. But if that doesn’t pan out like I feel it should, then I’m off to ‘church C,’ and I’ll keep doing this until I find one that’s the perfect fit for me.” At which point we might want to Gibbs-slap them and say: “**Look, Probie: the church doesn’t exist to cater to your specific wants or expectations, or to make you the center of attention. The church exists to carry out the work of God in a Christ-like manner and to honor Him alone, since He is not only its true foundation but also the very reason for its existence.**”

Okay, maybe leave off the Gibbs-slap. But the rest is good.... The final characteristic—and this one is by far one of the more challenging one to correct—can be defined as: enjoyable dependence. This refers to the tendency of newbies relishing in the ability to do very little, yet expecting to receive so much. Thus, enjoyable dependence characterizes those who like to be served, while sitting comfortably in their recliner, and watching everyone else do all the work (*or service, or volunteering*). And as we’ve mentioned, in many cases the church sadly helped foster that way of thinking and doing things, thus enabling people to think (*and even believe*): this is what it means to be a member of the church. Or as Carey Nieuwhof puts it:

“**For too long, too many North American Christians have thought that sitting passively in the back row to get fed is what’s required of them, or that the main goal of finding a church is to attend one you “like.” [But t]he goal of any Christian should never be to find a church you like and sit in the back row. The goal should be to fully engage the mission [of the church].**”<sup>7</sup>

That final bit about engaging in the mission of the church is, effectively, the remedy to all of the characteristics we’ve just mentioned. If we can show new believers what the mission of the church is and how to engage with it, then the innocent ignorance, the confusion, the pride, the self-focus, and the enjoyable dependence will begin to fade. And when those begin to fade, so does the desire to remain cozily wrapped in the comfort of the newbie recliner.

### ***b. Making Changes that Matter***

Here’s why all of this is important. In our conversations and building of relationships with the new believers: whenever we hear these sorts of claims or recognize these sorts of tendencies, the responsibility of helping grow and develop in their faith (*in healthy, God-honoring ways*) is not simply and repeatedly reminding them: “**Hey, let’s not say that.**” Rather it involves helping them take ownership of the need for a complete reorientation of the mind and heart. A need that’s tied to the truth that the mind and the heart of the believer can no longer be bound to the ways and rationale of the world. Rather, the heart and the mind of the believer have been set free, made new, and transformed by God’s saving work in Christ and by the power of the Spirit; and that saving transformation ought to define one’s thoughts, speech, and actions.

As Paul says: “**Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable**

<sup>6</sup> T. Rainer, “How Pastors Feel When Church Members Leave,” [found here](#) (accessed 23-Mar-17).

<sup>7</sup> C. Nieuwhof, “7 Ways to Grow Church Attendance by Increasing Engagement,” [found here](#) (accessed 23-Mar-17).

service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12.1–2). And to be clear: contrary to popular opinion, we’re never the standard by which God’s will is determined to be good, well-pleasing, and perfect. (*Satan convinced Adam and Eve to think otherwise, and look how that turned out. And his strategies and motives have not changed*). The standard is always God Himself—especially as revealed in Christ Jesus, and made a vital part of who we are in Christ. What Paul describes as “**the mind of Christ,**” given by God through the Holy Spirit (see *1 Cor 2.12–16*). And the extent to which this reorientation of the mind has taken place will be revealed in one’s life and speech.

### **3. BETTER PRACTICES**

So, when we hear those kinds of things said or see those kinds of characteristics, we can begin to understand the kinds of real-needs that must be addressed and met. And in patiently and compassionately seeking to meet these needs in healthy, God-honoring ways, we’re able to ensure the pursuit of better practices for true discipleship. Practices that take us beyond simply wanting butts-in-seats and into fulfilling the call to make disciples who strive to grow in faith and service. So, what are the needs of new believers? While the specifics will vary from person to person, determined largely through conversation, there are at least four rather basic needs that newbies have when it comes to helping them navigate their new faith.

#### ***a. Sense of Belonging***

The first need is a sense of belonging. This is a natural result or need for those who have just started a new life in Christ. If all things have gone as they should in the evangelism step, then new believers will be leaving behind an entire way of life that served as their identity—one that felt safe, familiar, comfortable, and automatic. But at the same time, they’re taking on an entirely new way of life, which will be a reflection of their new identity in Christ. As such, there will be much that is unfamiliar, uneasy, or even foreign, and part of that includes the struggle with belonging. But if the relationships that we made prior to this step were true and real, then this need is easier to meet. In which case, the newbie simply needs ongoing assurance.

However, we also need to make sure the assurance does not lead to placating or coddling. Thus, while we want the new believer to know that they are now a part of the family of God, and that we know they will need time to grow and develop as new members in that family; we cannot allow them to remain babes in Christ—or even to behave in ways that indicate a lack of maturity or even a desire to mature. Or to change tack: just as we would not allow people to remain in kindergarten their whole lives, simply because they don’t want to give up the cookies, the naps, the games, and the coloring sheets; we cannot allow new believers to stay in the newfound recliner of their faith—taking it easy, doing very little, and watching everyone else carry the load. They need to know that with belonging comes responsibility.

#### ***b. Modeled Speech and Behavior***

That leads us to the second need: modeled speech and behavior. Here we begin to see how discipling new believers can be a lot like parenting. Loads of things are second-nature for long-standing Christians, and there is an immense vocabulary that the church uses in ordinary life without missing a beat. But all of this is basically unknown and therefore has to be learned and acquired by the new believer. Thus, just like teaching an infant to stand, walk, and talk—and doing so with patience and grace—we need to be ready and willing to help new believers

“find their feet” and “their voice” in this new life. And one essential (*not to mention effective*) way to meet that need is for the more mature believers to model it for them.

Thus, we need to model for them the “language” of the church and faith, how to pray to and hear from God, and how to start walking in the newness of Christian life. And we need to allow them to make mistakes along the way. We need to be okay with the occasional slip-up. And we need to be patient with them when they get confused, have doubts about their abilities, or even throw tantrums. (*Yes, that does happen sometimes*). All of this is a part of growing up in Christ—we all went through it. And that is why one of the best ways to teach newbies is through modeling maturity of faith ourselves. Thus, in the similar way that children learn by imitating their parents, new believers learn by imitating the “more mature” in faith.

### **c. Teaching for Wisdom**

From that comes the third need: purposeful instruction. Or better: teaching for wisdom. Albert Einstein once remarked: “If a young man has trained his muscles and physical endurance by gymnastics and walking, he will later be fitted for every physical work. This is also analogous to the training of the mind and the exercising of the mental and manual skill. Thus the wit was not wrong who defined education in this way: ‘Education is that which remains, if one has forgotten everything he learned in school’.”<sup>8</sup> Now, to be clear: Einstein is not saying do away with the forgettable things taught in schools. His point is that education is not measured by the mere accumulation of facts and figures. It is measured by one’s ability to use those facts and figures in living, breathing ways.

And to connect this back with the modeling idea: this type of instruction was a vital part of the home-life in ancient Judaism—i.e., the children saw and learned from their parents, who themselves were striving to live out God’s wisdom. And as we discover in Paul’s instruction for the elders in the church: there’s an expectation for them to be the models of the characteristics that define one’s new life in Christ. And they are to be able-guides or teachers for those who are new to the new life in Christ. Thus, like children in the home: newbies need instruction, guidance, and they need role-models who can lead them to a life characterized by—as Paul tells Titus—“good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, [and] sound in speech which is beyond reproach” (Titus 2.7–8a, NASB). Once more: healthy, meaningful discipleship happens when those farther along in the faith come alongside those who just beginning.

### **d. “Independent” Growth**

We’ve all heard the mantra, “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” Just FYI: a quick Google search of this phrase shows people’s confusion about its origin. A number of people think it comes from the Bible (*bunch of newbies*), a few think it’s an ancient Chinese proverb, while others (*rightly*) know it’s from a 19th century English novel.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the original makes the point more apt: “If you give a man a fish, he is hungry again in an hour.” And when we relate it to discipling the newbie Christian, the applications emerge on their own. Specifically, and along with not letting them only sit back, relax, and enjoy the service: we cannot do everything for them. We need to teach them and encourage them to learn how to grow, take ownership of their faith, and serve alongside other believers. We need to teach them how to fish.

<sup>8</sup> A. Einstein, *In His Own Words* (Portland House, 2000), 222.

<sup>9</sup> See A.I.T. Ritchie, *Mrs Dymond* (Smith, Elder, & Co., 1885), 342.

But in doing so, we need to keep another thing in mind. Since newbies are exactly that, they are not immediately equipped to know what it means to be mature in Christ and therefore experienced servants in the church. They need to learn the basics first before moving on to the more intricate details. Or to borrow a biblical metaphor: we need to help newbies move from the “milk” to the “meat” (1 Cor 3.1–2; Heb 5.13–6.2). A parent doesn’t give solid food—or a fat, juicy steak—to an infant. Rather the child receives what is best for his or her needs, based on what he or she is able to handle at the time. But eventually, as the child grows, not only do the needs change but also the abilities as well as capabilities. And parents must be ready to help and train the child to negotiate those changes in healthy, meaningful ways.

In a similar way: as new believers grow in faith, they need to be not only fed in accordance with their growth but also taught how to “feed themselves.” And that’s just a churchy way of saying: they need to learn how to study the Bible appropriately and beneficially, how to pray humbly and wisely, how to serve obediently and selflessly, how to worship in spirit and truth, and even how to live holy and pure lives. (*And one of the many things I love about our church: we have opportunities for all of this to happen. Come see me afterward if you want to know more*). And when newbies learn how to do such things, they are better prepared to realize that the recliner is not the end-all of what it means to be a Christian—or even a church-member. And they will realize that being a faithful disciple in God’s church cannot be done from the comfort of the aptly-named, “Lay-z-boy.” They have to get up.

## 5. ENCOURAGED TO “MOVE OUT” BUT STAY IN

That brings us to the final point: we need to encourage the newbie to surrender the comfort, the ease, and the enjoyments of this second chair of discipleship. A basic way to make this happen is by being aware of and emphasizing two realities about the Christian life. And we will close out this morning with these two.

First, as we saw before: when newbies enter the new life in Christ, they will be leaving behind an entire way of life—a history, a past—that once served as their identity. This means, during the early stages, there will be loads of nostalgia, grieving the loss, and temptations to go back (*recall the connections with our brief study through Heb 1*). And this tends to happen because the way things were. All of it was safe, familiar, automatic, and comfortable. Thus, it’s easy for newbies to desire to relive the past—the glory-days of old. But, as believers in Christ, and as people who have been adopted into the family of God and given a new identity by the Spirit, that cannot happen. Sure, we can remember the past and even be thankful for how God used it to bring us to where we are. But we cannot memorialize it, sacralize it, or even relive it.

The past must remain the past. It can’t be permitted to have any power, any influence, or any say on the life we now have in Christ. We’ve moved into a new household and we have every reason to stay in it and not run away to what we left behind. Paul stresses this when (*after listing all the “great” things that identified his former life*) he says: “[these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung—that I may gain Christ and be found in Him](#)” (Phil 3.7–9a). And as he goes on to suggest: we do this because the life we now have in Christ is not defined by that which was left behind. It’s defined by our new identity as children of God, who have been adopted into God’s family and are members of His household.



Moreover, the new life is defined by both the present, ongoing work of God through the Holy Spirit and the future life we will have with God in eternity. Thus, as Paul says: “I am single-minded: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, with this goal in mind, I strive toward the price of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3.13b–14). Or if you prefer the more direct, hard-hitting route: this is why Jesus so bluntly told His disciples, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back [*and the language here denotes continual action*] is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk 9.62). Thus, if we allow newbies to be shackled to or simply enticed by their past, and to be held captive or spellbound by the false promises and hopes of nostalgia, then they will never be free to move forward and have the true life promised by the One who is to be the sole focus of their faithful allegiance.

The second thing to know and emphasize is simply this: we need to encourage newbies to have an awareness of the larger whole of which they are now a vital part. This means there needs to be a shift in focus: from the self to others. And applies not only to their place in a church community but also the role they are to have in spreading God’s saving message and His kingdom in this world. Naturally this can only happen when newbies are no longer bound to their pasts, but when they freely live in the God-guaranteed hope of the future and are no longer allured by the comforts of the recliner. It happens when newbies are set free and cannot help but get up and act.

We therefore need to inspire, teach, and train these new believers not only what it means to be made new in Christ but also in how to serve God—both in the local church and the wider world—and then provide ways for them to do so. And as anticlimactic as it might sound, what that provision looks like will have to wait until next week, when we’ll consider the next stage of the discipleship process—a stage that is known by its fervency to serve.

## **DISMISSAL**

We leave this place to be God’s church with this word of assurance from Peter: “You have purified your souls by obeying the truth in order to show sincere mutual love. So love one another earnestly from a pure heart. You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For ‘*all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever*. And this is the word that was proclaimed to you. So get rid of all evil and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. And yearn like newborn infants for pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up to salvation, if *you have experienced the Lord’s kindness*. So as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and precious in God’s sight, you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1.22–2.5)