



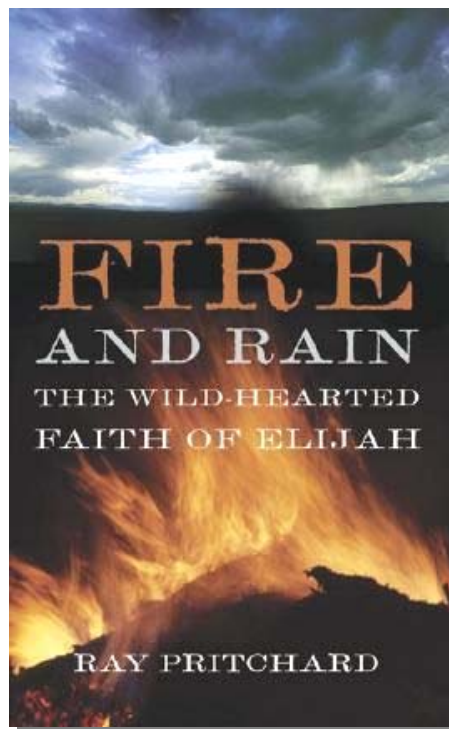
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

The "HARD" Is What Makes It GOOD!

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JULY 11, 2010

LESSON #6 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



The "HARD" Is What Makes It GOOD!



What does it take to follow someone? *On April 21st, in the year 1519, the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez sailed into the harbor of Vera Cruz, Mexico. He brought with him only about 600 men, and yet over the next two years his vastly outnumbered forces were able to defeat Montezuma and all the warriors of the Aztec empire, making Cortez the conqueror of all Mexico. How was this incredible feat accomplished, when two prior expeditions had failed even to establish a colony on Mexican soil? Here's the secret. Cortez knew from the very beginning that he and his men faced incredible odds. He knew that the road before them would be dangerous and difficult. He knew that his men would be tempted to abandon their quest and return to Spain. And so, as soon as Cortez and his men had come ashore and unloaded their provisions, he ordered their entire fleet of eleven ships burned and destroyed. His men stood on the shore and watched as their only possibility of retreat burned and sank. And from that point on, they knew beyond any doubt there was no return, no turning back. Nothing lay behind them but empty ocean. Their only option was to go forward, to conquer or die.*

Notice the title on the board today: THE HARD IS WHAT MAKES IT GOOD! That's a quote that you read this week on Day Five of your bible study about Elijah from Dr. Ray Pritchard's book *Fire And Rain*. If you missed it, it's on page 78 on your quarterly and is taken from an old Tom Hanks and Geena Davis movie called *A League of Their Own*. Like our writer, Dr. Pritchard, I also love that movie, especially the memorable quotes like this one: *"the hard is what makes it good."* If you don't remember the movie, it's about girls' professional baseball during World War II—at a time when all the men were off at war. Near the end of the film, the team coached by Tom Hanks is about to play in the All-American Girls' World Series. Geena Davis, the star catcher, has decided to go home because her husband has returned from the

war. Hanks' confronts her by reminding her of how much she loves the game.

I've got a short video clip from the movie that I think will help you understand exactly what this phrase means—not only about baseball, but about the Christian life as well. [PLAY YOUTUBE CLIP OF "A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN, PART 10". BEGIN AT 8:17 AND END AT 8:40—PLAY 23 SECONDS: [HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=M888NLVxZU8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M888NLVxZU8)

What does the phrase "*the hard is what makes it good*" really mean? (Pause for class to answer) Just like Dr. Pritchard reminds us, there will be hard days, bad days, sad days, discouraging days, confusing days, angry days, frustrating days, boring days, upsetting days, *discombobulating* days—and then there will be some really bad days. The hard is what makes it good. Like Tom Hanks says in the movie, "If it were easy, anyone could do it." But, we know that's not the case with most things. And, especially when it comes to walking the Christ road. Not everyone can walk it! Your memory verse this week will be a constant reminder of that. Listen to what Christ Himself tells his disciples in **MATTHEW 7: 13-14 (NIV)** from the Sermon on the Mount about that: ¹³*"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

Today, we wrap up Week Six of our lesson on Elijah. **As we start, what is one event you remember from Elijah's life? What is one thing you recall about Elijah?** You will remember that last week we looked at Elijah in a depressing state and how God allowed him to get some rest and refreshment and then gave him a renewed vision that his work was not finished. This week, we see Elijah getting some help—an apprentice and his eventual successor, Elisha. We see a great example of how we likewise are to respond to God's call upon us as individuals to serve Him.

Turn to **1 KINGS 19: 19-21 (NLT)** and let's read the story of Elisha's call: *"¹⁹So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away.²⁰Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!" Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you."²¹So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.*

Thanks to God's kind and gentle dealing of Elijah that we studied last week, Elijah gets back to God's business plan for his life. And God allows Elijah to pass his mantle to Elisha, his successor, but not before giving Elijah a close personal friend. In these verses, we see Elisha, a simple farmer, who is suddenly and unexpectedly approached by the famous prophet Elijah and invited to accompany him and serve him as his personal assistant. When Elisha requests time to first go home and say good-bye to his parents, Elijah makes it clear that the decision to come is entirely Elisha's to make. "What have I done to you?" means, in essence, "What claim do I have on you?" And the implied answer is "none." In other words, Elisha is free to stay or go. In response, Elisha not only chooses to accept the call, but he slaughters his oxen and feeds them to his neighbors, burning his plowing equipment to cook the meat. By doing this, he publicly and irrevocably declares his intention to leave his former way of life and follow Elijah.

God has not designed us to live like hermits in a cave. He has designed us to live in friendship and fellowship and community with others. That's why the church—the body of Christ—is so very important, for it is there that we are drawn together in love and mutual encouragement. We are meant to be a part of one

another's lives. Otherwise, we pull back, focusing on ourselves—thinking how hard we have it or how unfair others are. A perfect example of the body of Christ coming together for each other just this week can be seen in the actions of many of you in this class going the extra mile by ministering, visiting and taking meals to the Don and Joan Gregory following the four bypasses that Joan had last week.

So, let's think about how we can apply the principles we see in Elijah's call of Elisha to our own lives. **What was Elisha doing when God called him? [PLOWING FIELDS—WORKING HARD] What do we learn about following God from this?** God never calls idle, lazy men. Instead, He calls men who are faithful, diligent, and hardworking and are faithful in everyday duties. Turn to **LUKE 16:10,11 (NLT)** and let's back this principle up with scripture: *¹⁰"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. ¹¹And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?"*

Elisha was plowing. This was very strenuous work. Ancient plows were tree trunks with branches forming in opposite directions. During the times of the kings, plows were made of iron. In war time, Joel said the plowshares were built into swords. The plows were pulled by oxen. Twelve teams of oxen were in this field. Elisha is guiding the last team of oxen. And notice what impact God's divine call would have on Elisha's life: total surrender and leaving everything that he knew—a difficult choice. The **FIRST TRUTH** about God's call is this: **God's call involves ALL YOU HAVE (v19).**

Sounds a lot like a call for Elisha to "burn his boat." And isn't that exactly what we see in **verse 21** when he burns the plow. That's very similar to what Jesus says to the crowd in **LUKE 9: 23-24 (NLT)**. Listen: *²³Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish*

*ways, **take up your cross daily, and follow me.** ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."*

God calls Elisha to something different. And it involved his whole life. The call was, *"Surrender everything to me."* And the call is the same for us. God wants all you have: all your time, all your money, all your resources. **Simply, is everything of yours His?** Each one of us here this morning has been called by God to surrender our all—and in turn, God has a plan for us, if we but hear and obey. **JEREMIAH 29: 11 (NKJV)** says, *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

The story is told about a Haitian pastor who told his congregation this gruesome parable: A certain man wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. Another man wanted very badly to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door. After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So first the owner went out found the carcass of a dead animal, and hung it from the nail he still owned. Soon the house became unlivable and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail. The Haitian pastor's conclusion: "If we leave the Devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ's habitation."

Many people are happy to have Christ as a **part** of their life. This is the one thing Christ will not do. He will be the center of your life, or He will stay out of your life, but He will not be a small part of your life. He is, after all, God. **God wants everything, no holding back.**

The **SECOND TRUTH** about God's call is this: **God's call requires ACTIONS as well as WORDS (v20)**. Elisha wanted to say goodbye. Not a bad thing in itself, but he was opening up to be persuaded **out** of following God's plans. Funny how family can be your biggest challenge to obedience. Elijah's response to Elisha was basically, *"Look, I haven't said or done anything, Elisha. I haven't called you. God has. If you don't like how it's run, your problem is with God, not me."* So, the ball was in Elisha's court. If he obeyed, it was his decision. It wasn't Elijah's. It was not other people's mistakes or faults. It was his own. His actions would decide if his words had been true.

I recently heard about a husband and wife who were both doctors—one a doctor of theology and the other a doctor of medicine. When their doorbell was rung and the maid answered, the inquirer would often ask for "the doctor." The maid's interesting reply was: "Do you want the one who preaches or the one who practices?" **Which are you?**

The **THIRD TRUTH** of God's call is this: **God's call encompasses SERVICE to OTHERS (v21)**. There's no getting around it. God's call is not unto selfishness. It's not an introspective call all the time. God calls you to serve others, and not look out just for your own interests. You have been forgiven and set free so that you can be a blessing to others. We need to be reminded of what Paul says about this in **EPHESIANS 2:10 (NCV)**: *God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do **good works**, which God planned in **advance** for us to live our lives doing.*

People who refuse to get involved with helping others in need are like the two shipwrecked men in a lifeboat. *From their end of the boat, the pair watched as those at the other end bailed frantically to keep the boat afloat. The one said to the other, "Thank heaven, the hole isn't on our end of the boat."* You know, this really is a struggle for each of us. When a crisis happens, we

always wonder **how** it will affect **us**. How often do we have to be reminded that it's not about us!

So will you serve others? Or has the goal of your life become, "What more can I do to be happy? What can I get others to do that will make me happy?" God's call for you, his purpose for you, the way to find real meaning in life, is to serve others, to overcome selfishness, and bless other people with your life. That's what we see in Elisha's response to God's call. A

Everyone's life makes a statement about what is important to him or her. And for many tired, worn-out, weary Christians the statement is this: *"My Christianity doesn't work."* **What is the statement your life makes?** Albert Schweitzer once said that *"you must give time to your fellow men — even if it's a little thing; do something for others—something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it."*

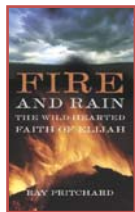
As Dr. Pritchard pointed out to us this week on Day Two, there is a high cost involved in truly following Jesus. How far are you willing to go for your Savior today? As was pointed out in the passages shown in the margin on page 74 of your quarterly, listen to **LUKE 14:26 (NLT)**: *"If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.* May I encourage you to review all three translations of that verse later today as you pray about God's call upon your life.

President Abraham Lincoln often visited hospitals to talk with wounded soldiers during the Civil War. Once, doctors pointed out a young soldier who was near death and Lincoln went over to his bedside. "Is there anything I can do for you?" asked the President. The soldier obviously didn't recognize Lincoln and with some effort he was able to whisper, "Would you please write a letter to my mother?" A pen and paper were provided and the President carefully began writing down what the young man was

able to say: "My dearest mother, I was badly hurt while doing my duty. I'm afraid I'm not going to recover. Don't grieve too much for me, please. Kiss Mary and John for me. May God bless you and father." The soldier was too weak to continue, so Lincoln signed the letter for him and added, "Written for your son by Abraham Lincoln." The young man asked to see the note and was astonished when he discovered who had written it. "Are you really the President?" he asked. "Yes, I am," Lincoln replied quietly. Then he asked if there was anything else he could do. "Would you please hold my hand?" the soldier asked. "It will help to see me through to the end." In the hushed room, the tall gaunt President took the boy's hand in his and spoke warm words of encouragement until death came.

In closing, let me ask you a question: what do you need to do to be completely devoted to Christ? We are reminded by Christ in **MATTHEW 6:33** that we are to *"seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness."* *First!* As was the case in our opening story about Cortez burning the boats, what "boats" is God calling you to burn? What "escape hatches" or "exit doors" do you need to slam shut and padlock? What tangible steps of commitment is God calling you to make today? Burn your boats. Whatever it is that keeps you safe, that keeps you from obedience, burn it. Sink it. Get rid of it. No turning back. It's going to be hard, but remember **THE HARD IS WHAT MAKES IT GOOD!**

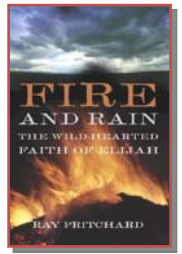
Let's Pray.



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The "HARD" Is What Makes It GOOD!



1. **MATTHEW 7:13-14 (NIV)**, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to _____, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to _____, and only a _____ find it."
2. God has not designed us to live like hermits in a cave. He has designed us to live in _____ and _____ and _____ with others.
3. God never calls idle, lazy men. Instead, He calls men who are _____, _____, and _____ and are faithful in everyday duties.
- ★ **LUKE 16:10,11 (NLT)**: "If you are _____ in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are _____ about worldly wealth, who will trust _____ with the true riches of heaven?"
4. The **first truth** about God's call is: God's call involves _____.
5. The **second truth** about God's call is: God's call requires _____ as well as _____.
6. The **third truth** of God's call is: God's call encompasses _____ to _____.
7. **LUKE 14: 26 (NLT)**, "If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by _____— your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters— yes, even your own _____." Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.