

Complete Discipleship

✦ grace-given...driven unity

In the name of the LORD, my strength and my song, dearly beloved of God:

At high noon on the eve of All Saints Day which our society now hides in Halloween, a university professor and priest approached the wooden door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He was distressed that church officials were selling pieces of paper to poor souls who thought they could buy God's forgiveness for themselves and dead loved ones. Ninety-five statements in Latin he nailed to that public bulletin board for scholars to debate indulgences as he worked to pastor God's people in his care. Later he would marvel that a scrap of paper ignited the world in what became the Lutheran Reformation.

As we celebrate REFORMATION SUNDAY, we marvel at the wonder of **grace-driven unity** which God is still giving us in our Lutheran heritage from *Scripture Alone*, for salvation in *Christ Alone*, received by *Faith Alone*, totally undeserved by *Grace Alone*. The secret of **Complete Discipleship** is in the first of Luther's 95 Theses: *When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.* Here in repentance we find a priceless gem: Healthy, happy relationships begin and end with God. **Complete Discipleship** is **grace-given**.

A rich young ruler ran up to Jesus with a question: *"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except one—God. You know the commandments. 'You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.'*" *The man replied, "Teacher, I have kept all these since I was a child." Jesus looked at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* (Mark 10:17–21 EHV¹) **Grace** rejected – like the church he left Christ.

See why Luther referenced Matthew 4:17 in his 95 Theses? *"Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near."* Unfortunately, no one had Bibles in those days to see the priceless riches of God's **grace** in Christ. The few Bibles were hand-copied, in Latin, locked in libraries only for scholars. And this key word was not translated, **repent**, but "Do penance." Discipleship was not about what God has done for you. It was able about what you had to do for God to appease His anger at your sin.

Martin Luther tried. Terrorized by a thunderstorm, he swore to become a monk. He gave all his possessions to the poor, entering the Augustinian order of the poorest monks. Looking back years later Luther wrote: "When I was a monk, I read the mass daily. I weakened myself with prayer and fasting so much that I couldn't have kept it up much longer. Yet all of my efforts couldn't help me in the smallest temptation. I could never say to God, 'I have done all this. Look at it, and be merciful to me.' What did I achieve with all this striving? Nothing. I merely tormented myself, ruined my health, and wasted my time. Now I'm forced to listen to Christ's judgment on my works. He says, 'You did all this without me. That's why it amounts to nothing. Your works don't belong in my kingdom. They can't help you or anyone else obtain eternal life.'" As Jesus says, *"Without me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5)

As a university professor of the Bible, Luther discovered the sweetness of **repentance**. God works in us a change of mind about sin and self and Savior. God gives forgiveness fully and completely through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son Jesus on the cross. God removes our guilt and no longer looks at our sin. By faith He sees only Jesus and His righteousness covering us. **Grace** is freely **given** as a gift.

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Unity with God in Christ is so *good and pleasant*, forgiveness also sets you free to love God and to pray. ***“I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him... bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you continue to bear much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”*** (John 15:5–8 EHV)

God loves you even when it seems He hates you. A Gentile woman begged Jesus, ***“Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!”*** Silence...as Jesus’ disciples tried to get rid of her. Jesus says He only came for the Jews, but she keeps praying, ***“Lord help me!”*** Insult: ***“It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to their little dogs.”*** ***“Yes, Lord, yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”*** Jesus answered, ***“Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire.”*** ***And her daughter was healed at that very hour.”*** (Matthew 15:21–28 EHV) **Grace-driven** faith sets you free from guilt and fear to pray boldly.

Unlike the rich young ruler, a tax collector named Zacchaeus received **grace-driven unity**. He loved his money and used the Roman soldiers for legalize extortion. But then Jesus invites himself over to Z-man’s place. Dinner served, better by God in such rich, forgiving **grace!** ***Zacchaeus stood up and said...“Look, Lord, I am going to give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”*** (Luke 19:8 EHV) God gave **Complete Discipleship** to this repentant tax collector. See, repentance is sorrow over sin plus trusting God’s forgiveness for you.

By faith teenagers too are covered with the righteousness of Christ. In our place Jesus honored His parents even when Mary publicly scolded Jesus in the temple. Jesus ***was always obedient to them*** as He ***grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.”*** (Luke 2:48–52 EHV)

Covered with Christ in the **grace-driven unity** of repentant faith, by the miracle and mystery of Christ with His holy bride the church, a husband learns to love his wife as Christ loved the church. Jesus made it easy for His bride to respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:25-27, 33 EHV) Miracle of Life-long **unity**.

In the **unity** of Christ we even submit to government unless it commands to disobey God. With Jesus’ persecuted apostles we answer: ***“We must obey God rather than men.”*** ***“For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*** (Acts 5:29; 4:17 EHV)

Government run universities took quite a turn for the better in the Lutheran Reformation. Girls were only allowed to work at home, but Martin Luther included them in Catechism and school. The Lutheran Reformation began on the campus of the new University in Wittenberg. Sadly an American university professor years ago shared how members of his faculty saw their life’s ambition “to strip away every bit of faith from their students.” Still some professors tear at Bible truth, yet God’s Word for **Complete Discipleship** endures. ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*** (Matthew 24:35) WELS Camps Ministry is celebrating a century of **grace-driven unity** this year. On the dashboard medallion of Campus Ministry student: *God said. I believe it. That settles it.*

Healthy relationships begin and end with God. We belong to each other as ***“one body in Christ... individually members of one another.”*** (Romans 12:5 EHV) From baptism’s cradle to life’s last breath, ***“make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”*** (Ephesians 4:3 NIV84)

Years ago a New Life member visited his dying father. They’d never talked about faith. As cancer took its toll, the son said, “Dad, I wish I could tell you about the peace I have in Jesus my Savior.” His Dad answered, “I know. I know.” Heaven opens on Jesus shouting in triumph: “Mine forever!” Angels are cheering one more sinner in repentance: “Yes! Glory to God!” Later, unable to speak any longer, he listened to a devotion about God’s love. Then he took my hand, pulled me in close and kissed my cheek. Strength gone, power surging in Christ for eternity. At last **Complete Discipleship**. ***“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”*** (Psalm 16:11 NIV84) ***How good and how pleasant it is ! Amen.***

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