



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 17:1-10  
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## Grown Up Discipleship

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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In the movie, *Neverland*, an imaginary boy, Peter Pan, comes to life for the purpose of taking lost little boys and Wendy away to his home. Peter is the personification of the phrase, "I will never grow up," and he never does. But in his quest to always have fun and never become a man, Peter Pan must guard his emotions closely. He can never truly love anyone. If he did, he might take responsibility for their care, and responsibility is too grown-up for Peter Pan. Wendy, however, falls in love with Peter. In the moonlit forest of Neverland, she decides to confront him over his all-play, no-commitment attitude.

"Peter, what are your real feelings?"

"Feelings?" he asks.

"What do you feel? Happiness? Sadness? Jealousy? Anger? Love?"

"Love? I have never heard of it."

"I think you have, Peter. I dare say you've felt it yourself...for something, or someone."

"Never. Even the sound of it offends me."

Wendy reaches for Peter in a loving gesture, and suddenly he runs away, shouting, "Why do you spoil everything? We have fun, don't we? I taught you to fight and to fly. What more could there be?"

"There is so much more," she answers.

"What? What else is there?"

"I don't know. I think it becomes clearer when you grow up."

"Well, I will not grow up! You cannot make me! Go home and grow up. And take your feelings with you."

Sometimes don't you feel like Peter? "I don't want to grow up. It's too hard." Sometimes we're like that in our following of Christ; in our discipleship. It's nothing new. In our study of the gospel of Luke, Jesus is on his journey to Jerusalem. With him, of course, are his disciples. It's kind of a long and winding road that they're on and Jesus uses that time to talk to his followers about what it means to be his disciple. In many ways, he's saying to them something similar to what Wendy says to Peter: "It's time to grow up." And part of growing up is learning how to love and how to take responsibility for others. Doing that is risky because we might experience feelings like sadness and anger and jealousy. But a lot of Christians want to stay a child and live in Neverland because it's so much safer.

The church, of course, is anything but Neverland. The community of God's people is in fact a messy place

where all those feelings are felt. It was true then and it's true now. Jesus knew that and so he addresses us about grown up discipleship. There are four things you need to do to be a grown up disciple. The first two deal with your relationship with others and the last two deal with your relationship with God.

### I. Don't cause others to sin.

**"He said to His disciples, 'It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him'"** (Luke 17:1-3).

A stumbling block is something that causes another person to stumble in their faith; to sin. He's probably talking about causing them to stumble badly; to turn aside from following Christ. In v. 2 he especially mentions "little ones." He's not talking about children, although this could include children. He's talking about young or new believers; people who are just learning how to walk in their faith. Have you ever seen a little one-year-old learning to walk? It doesn't take much to cause them to stumble. Newer believers can easily stumble as well. Have you known someone who was just starting out in their walk with Christ, and something happened and they stumbled and they never really got up; they might not even claim to be a Christian anymore? That's what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus says the reality is that in this new community I am forming stumbling blocks will come. Part of that is because we can't escape from the world, and the world is full of things that can cause us to stumble. University professors attack the truthfulness of the Bible and if you're not equipped what they say makes sense. Casual sex is made to look so good and even so right in books and movies. Authority figures like parents or policemen or coaches often fail to practice what they preach and that impacts those who look to them for guidance. The human condition makes stumbling blocks inevitable.

But Jesus says, "Woe to him through whom they come. It would be better for them to die a Mafia style death, thrown into the sea with a heavy millstone tied around his neck, than to do that." Now we're getting close

to home. Jesus is warning US. There are things that happen within the community of faith that cause these little ones to stumble, so watch out, be on your guard! This doesn't mean these little ones aren't responsible for the choices they make, but if we're the ones influencing them in the wrong direction, we share responsibility.

I believe he's talking about deliberate acts. I remember years ago watching six-year olds play T-Ball. One little boy hit the ball through the infield and as he was running with all of his might from first to second the second baseman nonchalantly just stuck his foot out and tripped him. The little guy crashed to the ground. The second baseman acted like nothing had happened, but it was a deliberate act.

We can do that sort of thing in a variety of ways. We can do it through our teaching. How many victims are there of health and wealth, name-it-and-claim-it teaching? Someone told them that if they just had more faith they would be wealthy or their cancer would disappear. But if it doesn't happen, they figure either God has rejected them or the whole thing is sham.

We can also do it through the misuse of our freedom. We know that in Christ we're not bound by legalism. We're free to make decisions about what we eat and what we drink and where we hang out and what movies we go see. But we have to be careful. All things may be lawful but not all things are profitable. And we have to be careful about the impact our choices make on younger believers. Paul says in 1 Cor. 8, "**But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.**" And then later he says, "**If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble**" (1 Cor. 8:9, 13). The misuse of our liberty can damage others.

I've also seen how hypocrisy can cause little ones to stumble. If a young believer looks up to us and yet we say one thing and do another without blinking an eye, they might conclude, like many, that this whole thing is a sham. I recall as a young believer one of my mentors told me to NOT to go see the movie, *The Exorcist*. But then later someone told me they saw HIM in line to go see the very movie he told me to avoid. At the time, that made me doubt the sincerity of his faith and for a moment it made me wonder if the whole thing was a paper house.

## II. Don't neglect those who sin.

But sometimes the issue is not with us causing others to stumble, but rather it's the responsibility we have when they fall. If your brother

stumbles, what do you do? Look at vv. 3b-4. "**Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him.**"

When Jesus talks about your "brother" he's talking about your brother or sister in Christ. This doesn't apply to those outside the community of faith. And notice he assumes that your brother will sin. Some people see sin in the church and they conclude that the church is just full of hypocrites. But that's not necessarily true. The church IS full of sinners, but it doesn't have to be full of hypocrites. Hypocrites are those who pretend to be something they're not. A true disciple doesn't claim to be anything but a sinner saved by grace, who is also a work in progress. We shouldn't be surprised when there is sin in the church. Later, he talks about people sinning against US. We shouldn't be surprised by that, either. Some people leave the church in disgust as soon as someone hurts them. Jesus doesn't give us that option.

He says, "**If your brother sins, rebuke him.**" We live in a society where people say, "You can't do that. That's none of your business." But Jesus says it IS your business. In a family, your business is my business. What I do impacts everyone else. And we're part of a family. Others say, "Well, that's being judgmental. You can't rebuke them because that's being self-righteous. No one is perfect." But we can rebuke a brother or a sister without an attitude of superiority. We can go humbly and gently. In Gal. 6:1-2, Paul says, "**Brothers, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.**" What is the law of Christ? It's the law of love. That's the right attitude to use when you rebuke a person. And you go because you love them and you go humbly and gently. The most loving thing you can do for someone is to rebuke them. Your child runs out into the street where a car can run them over; what kind of love is it that says, "Don't say anything. Mind your own business. You wouldn't want to hurt their feelings. You really shouldn't be that judgmental. I mean, you're not perfect." That's not love, that's foolishness!

There are some things to be careful about in doing this. Be sure you're really dealing with sin. Some people might just irritate you, and you would like to rebuke them for that, but that's not sin. You don't rebuke that, you tolerate that. We also have to be careful not to think of ourselves as spiritual watchdogs. Some people think they have the gift of rebuking! Last time I looked that wasn't one of the gifts. People like that usually also have the gift of pride.

And usually they're not very good at the other thing Jesus says. He says, "If your brother repents, forgive him." I can do that. But it's the next thing that bothers me: "Oh,

and if he sins against YOU seven times IN ONE DAY, but each time comes back and repents, forgive him each time he comes back." The number seven, of course, was often used back then to speak of an unlimited amount, so you don't stop at seven.

Let's just be honest here. This brings up all kinds of questions. Shouldn't we at least question the sincerity of their repentance if they keep doing the same thing to us over and over again? I've heard someone say, "The first time shame on you; the second time shame on me." But Jesus doesn't say to put their repentance under a microscope. He just says, "If they repent, forgive them." But what if their sins are really putting me and my family in danger, do I just let them destroy us? Shouldn't I establish some boundaries here? It's important to distinguish between forgiveness and trust. Forgiveness is free, while trust must be earned. Sometimes you have to offer forgiveness but withhold trust.

What is forgiveness? The word used here means to send away or to let go of. The idea is that you choose to let go of what that person has done to you. You don't deny it. You don't say, "Well, that really wasn't that bad." Or, "That really didn't hurt." That's not forgiveness; that's denial. Forgiveness is when you look a wrong right in the face and you call it what it is but you choose to let it go and not hold it against them.

Forgiveness is not an option for the follower of Christ. There are two reasons it's so important. First, because if you don't, you will be the one who pays the price. *"Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back -- in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you."* (Frederick Buechner)

The second reason it's so important is because if you don't, you'll be withholding the very thing you've so desperately needed. Ephesians 4:32 says, "**Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven you.**" How much have you been forgiven for? Do you count on that? Do you take it for granted?

Chris Carrier was abducted when he was 10 years old. His kidnapper, angry with the boy's family, burned him with cigarettes, stabbed him numerous times with an ice pick, then shot him in the head and left him to die. Remarkably, the boy survived, though he lost sight in one eye. No one was ever arrested, but recently, a man confessed to the crime. Carrier, now a youth pastor, went to see him. He found David McAllister, a 77-year-old ex-convict, frail and blind, living in a nursing home. He began visiting often, reading to McAllister from the Bible and

praying with him. His ministry opened the door for McAllister to come to faith. No arrest is forthcoming; after 22 years the statute of limitations is long past. Carrier says, "While many people can't understand how I could forgive him, from my point of view I couldn't *not* forgive him. If I'd chosen to hate him all these years, or spent my life looking for revenge, then I wouldn't be the man I am today, the man my wife and children love, the man God has helped me to be."

### III. Don't underestimate the faith you have.

You are probably thinking right now, "I could never do that. That's just asking too much." Well, you're in good company because that's exactly what the disciples felt. Look at vv. 5-6. "**The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith' And the Lord said, 'If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you.'**"

It's interesting that the disciples didn't ask for more love or tolerance so they could forgive, but they asked for more faith. I think they were right in this. They understood that THEY could not do these things on their own and it was by faith that such miracles as the ability to forgive would be accomplished in their lives. You see, faith in God produces in us a calm, restful spirit, which keeps us from seeking revenge and allows us to extend forgiveness. If you're having trouble forgiving, you need faith. You need to believe God is in control; that he's not asleep. We need to have faith that he loves us and will take care of us.

It's also interesting that Jesus doesn't grant their request. Jesus indicates that the faith which they have is plenty. When he says, "If you had faith like a mustard seed..." he uses a Greek construction that means, "If you had faith (and you do) like a mustard seed..." The mustard seed might have been small but it was real and it was alive. And so Jesus says don't underestimate the faith you have, but put it to use and you'll see what it can do. The mulberry tree had roots that some said stayed in the ground for 600 years. So Jesus says you can take your tiny mustard seed faith and use it to uproot a tree like that and plant it in the sea. In other words, you can do the impossible. You see, the power is not in the amount of faith but in the object of faith. Who's your faith in? If your faith is in God, just a little bit of faith is more than enough to root out those things in your life that keep you from forgiving.

Years ago I heard a sermon on Heb. 12:15 that has stuck in my mind. Heb. 12:15 warns us against allowing a "root of bitterness" to spring up in our lives and defile us. This week I was reminded of that as I read about the uprooting of the mulberry tree. You see, some of us have allowed deep roots of bitterness to sink into our hearts—perhaps towards a parent or a

daughter-in-law or a coworker or a former friend. And that's defiling your life. It's damaging all your relationships. You may think, "Well, that's just the way I am. I'll never be able to change that." Well, you're right, you can't change it, but God can. And you need to begin to use your faith and ask him to deal with that. Don't let it go. Don't ignore it. Don't deny it. Deal with it. Bring it to the throne of grace. Let him uproot it and let him plant something in its place that brings blessing to your life and the lives of those around you.

For years I struggled with deep insecurity. I daily fretted over what people thought of me. No doubt it was something I carried with me from my childhood so it was deeply rooted in me. It affected everything I did, especially my relationships. As a young Christian I was able to see it for what it was—self-centeredness—but I couldn't change it. But I kept praying about it and I asked others to pray for me. I guess you could say I had faith like a mustard seed. And one day I just kind of realized it was gone. My circumstances hadn't changed, but I had changed. I believe that was God. I believe that was as miraculous as uprooting a massive tree and planting it in the sea.

#### **IV. Don't overestimate your own service.**

When something like that happens, it's possible to begin to think more of ourselves than we should. So the fourth thing Jesus says about grown up discipleship is not to overestimate your own service. Look at vv. 7-10.

**"Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"**

This is a mini-parable with three rhetorical questions that are answered with a no, a yes, and a final no. Would any self respecting master invite his servant to come in from the field and sit down to eat before he does? No! Wouldn't he first tell his servant to make his dinner and clean up and serve the master before he ate? Yes. Would he thank the slave because he did what he was told to do? No. Then

Jesus gives the application: So you too when you've done everything I've told you to do are just unworthy slaves.

Jesus says, "Okay, you've done all these things. You've avoided being a stumbling block, you've rebuked a sinner and forgiven someone who has ruined your reputation, you've uprooted deeply ingrained sins through faith, **NOW DON'T GET A BIG HEAD! DON'T START THINKING THAT GOD IS INDEBTED TO YOU. DON'T START LOOKING FOR A PAT ON THE BACK FOR ALL YOUR SERVICE. DON'T START THINKING, 'HEY, GOD IS SURE LUCKY TO HAVE ME ON HIS TEAM. WHAT AM I GETTING OUT OF THIS?'**"

You ask one of your kids to clean his room. He does it but then he comes back and says you have to buy him a video game. Something is wrong with that picture! You ask an employee to get his expense report to you on time. He says, "Absolutely, but you have to promise me a raise." Yeah, right.

I don't believe Jesus means to demean us here. In other places he elevates our status. In John 15:15 he said to his disciples, **"No longer do I call you slaves...but I have called you friends."** In Gal. 4:7 Paul says, **"You are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."** Jesus is not denying our status as children of God; rather he's correcting a tendency that is lethal to grown up discipleship. We tend to forget that serving God is its own reward. He doesn't owe us a thank you. God is never our debtor. Here is the test: When you decide to serve the Lord, perhaps in some ministry in the church, do you expect gratitude? We're not volunteers of an organization; we're servants of God. You see, true servanthood begins where gratitude and applause ends. We ought to just be overjoyed to be able serve in his house.

#### **CONCLUSION**

So that's what grown up discipleship looks like. It's not a comprehensive list, but it's a good a start. Maybe we could use this like a growth chart to measure how grown up we really are. So let me ask you a few questions:

*When you see a dear brother or sister in Christ falling into sin, are you willing to move along side them in love with a gentle but firm rebuke or do you leave them alone?*

*Are you willing to forgive them when they come to grips with their sin and confess it? Are you willing to keep forgiving someone, even if it's you they've hurt or do you nurse a grudge?*

*Are you using the faith you have to ask God to uproot the most stubborn areas of your own life or have you given up?*

*Are you just grateful for the privilege of serving God or are you looking for a pat on the back?*

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