

**September 23, 2012**

**“Follow The Manufacturer’s Instructions”**

**Psalms 139:13-14 NIV**

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

I recently got a new car. My last car was completely manual, this one has power windows, and door locks. I still find myself trying to open my door with the key or reaching over to open a window or unlock the passenger’s door. Some of you are thinking, “You can open a window manually?”

The car came with a manual from the maker of the car. What do you think would happen if I decided not to read or follow the maker’s instructions? Imagine if I did whatever I wanted or thought was best. Like ignoring their safety instructions, what’s the big deal about keeping sparks and flames away from fuel related parts of the car; or only operating the engine if there is sufficient ventilation, hey, I’ll run the car in my closed garage if I want too, how else can I have the heat in the car nice and warm in the winter and not have to step outside to get into my warm car? Why should I have to let the engine or exhaust system cool down before I touch parts of the vehicle; or keep my hands away from moving parts? And I’m going to ignore those warning indicators on the instrument panel.

Don’t tell me the oil is low. Don’t tell me what type of oil to put in MY car and when to change it. I’ll go 50,000 miles without an oil change if I want to! And what if instead of using gasoline, I put maple syrup in the gas tank. You know what if, I’d be breaking down really quick.

The manual comes with the car to answer important questions about our vehicle.

It’s not just cars but everything we buy comes with instructions from the manufacture; everything from your cell phone to furniture that has to be assembled. My dad never read directions – it would drive me crazy. He just start putting something together, I say wait let me read the directions first. He’d say we don’t need those. If he could get the job done, it never quite looked the way it was suppose to look. Everything comes with instructions to answer our questions. Life comes with instructions from our Maker too.

There are great questions of life. Questions like: Who am I? Why am I here (or what is my purpose)? Where am I headed? And how will I get there? In order to answer these great questions of life it is important to know that we are wonderfully made. Ps 139:13-14

(Where the Psalmist says to the Lord) “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

We were created by God. God made not only our body but also our “inmost being” – our spirit. That part of us, our spirit, is meant to govern us. Yet, there is a problem with our spirit – AKA our heart.

Jeremiah 17:9-10a NLT

The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I know! I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives.

Our spirit is unable to govern our life because of what we just read in Jeremiah. Unable, that is, until by grace (a gift of God) through faith in Jesus Christ our heart is cleaned, so that our spirit becomes God’s dwelling place.

Until you have given up yourself to Him you will not have a real self...Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in. -C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Without the guidance of the indwelling Spirit of God we miss the fullness of who we are, who we are destined to become, and how we can get there. We are like sponges allowing ourselves to absorb the external information and customs of the world, so that our outer being, rather than our inner being shapes who we are. In other words, we are shaped from the “outside-in” rather than from the “inside-out.”

The moment Jesus Christ comes into our lives, His Spirit awakens, renews, ignites our dormant spirit and begins to transform from the inside out. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit enters and by His grace begins to govern our lives, allowing God’s plan to begin the process of conforming us into the beautiful image He has planned for us. But He can only show us who we are, and who we are destined to be, and how to get there, if we are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to refresh our inner being, releasing God’s power in us. This process begins with the decision to invite Jesus into our heart so that our spirit may become one with His Spirit, and it grows from there.

Galatians 2:20 NLT

I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

God has a plan and purpose for us, but are we allowing His plan and His Spirit in our inner being to conform us? He can only do that if we are not copying the behavior and customs of the world, but living by faith, trusting the Son of God Who loves us, gave Himself for us, and lives in us.

Romans 12:1-2 NLT

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice--the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

We are told not to copy the behavior and customs of this world, but instead let God transform us by changing the way we think. One way this happens is by knowing Our Maker's (God's) Manual, the Bible. This is why it is vital to spend time with God in The Word and prayer. If we are spending all our time or most of it absorbing the ways of the world and very little or no time with God what is going to shape us? We are going to be influenced from the outside-in rather than the inside-out. We are starving, while all the time the delicious and nourishing Word of God is readily available to us.

I heard a story of a man from Europe who sold everything he had to buy a ticket on a steam boat to come to America. All he had to eat was some cheese and crackers. Every day he'd eat his cheese and crackers while smelling the delectable aroma of delicious food being served right above him on the next deck in the dining room. Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. He went to the captain and said, "I will do anything, wash dishes, mop the floors, even clean the bathrooms, to have just one meal in the dining room." The captain looked at him in confusion and said, "But, sir, the price of your ticket includes meals."

That's us we settle for less when God has so much better for us.

2 Peter 3:18 NIV (we are exhorted to nourish our relationship with Christ)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Our relationship with God needs to be cultivated because it is so easy to fall back in to old ways. This relationship is cultivated by our time with God in Bible reading, and prayer, and then putting into practice what God tells us.

I have made a covenant with God that He sends me neither visions, dreams, nor even angels. I am well satisfied with the gift of the Holy Scriptures, which give me abundant instruction and all I need to know – both for this life and that which is to come. – Martin Luther

This is why beginning next week we are going to start a 40-day Bible Reading Program called, “Engage the Word.” It is a way to help us to daily be in God’s Word. It will include daily

readings, Bible Studies, and Sunday Sermons based on our daily readings. The goal is not just to know the Bible but to know God by the discipline of putting what we read into practice.

Duffy Daugherty, former football coach at Michigan State University, tells of Dave Kaiser’s winning field goal in a game against UCLA. The game was played in Los Angeles and the field goal gave State a last-second 17 to 14 victory. As Dave came back to the bench to meet the roaring enthusiasm of his teammates, Coach Daugherty said, “Nice going, Dave, but I noticed you didn’t watch the ball after you kicked it. How come?”

Kaiser replied, “You are right Coach, I didn’t watch the ball. I was watching the referee to see how he would call it. You see, I forgot my contact lenses. They are back at the hotel. I couldn’t even see the goal posts!”

Coach Daugherty was shocked and at first quite angry that Kaiser had not told him about the missing contacts. But after he thought it over he changed his mind. Why shouldn’t Kaiser kick without his contacts? He was a disciplined kicker and had practiced long hours. He knew well the angle and the distance to the goal even though he could not see it. The whole process of kicking the ball was programmed into his body and mind by the ongoing discipline of daily practice. In the moment when the ball went through the uprights, discipline paid off.

In a similar sense discipline is one of the most effective ways for guiding our actions. If we know and practice God’s word it will affect our behavior even becoming automatic in our life.

John 12:25-26 NLT

Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who despise their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. All those who want to be my disciples must come and follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And if they follow me, the Father will honor them.

John 15:5-8 NLT

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father.

If we truly are going to follow Jesus we must choose to love Him more than our own lives. We must do what He did, and everything Jesus did was to bring glory to the Father. If we choose to follow Jesus we must live for God's glory alone. Our reason for being is to bring glory to God in and through our lives. And how do we know what will bring glory to God? We learn it from His written word, the Bible and we remain in Jesus by obeying it that His words remain in us.

If our goal is to be like Jesus so that all we do is for the glory of God alone, then let us make a renewed commitment to be in God's Word and Prayer and not let the world rub-off on us, but live by trusting in the Son of God, who loves us and gave Himself for us.

There is an ancient story out of the Middle East which tells of three merchants crossing the desert. They were traveling at night in the darkness to avoid the heat of the day. As they were crossing over a dry creek bed, a loud attention-demanding voice out of the darkness commanded them to stop. They were then order to get down off their camels, stoop down and pick up pebbles from the creek bed, and put them into their pockets.

Immediately after doing as they had been commanded, they were then told to leave that place and continue until dawn before they stopped to set up camp. This mysterious voice told them that in the morning they would be both sad and happy. Understandably shaken, they obeyed the voice and traveled on through the rest of the night without stopping. When morning dawned, these three merchants anxiously looked into their pockets. Instead of finding the pebbles as expected, there were precious jewels! And, they were both happy and sad. Happy that they had picked up some of the pebbles, but sad because they hadn't gathered more when they had the opportunity.

This fable expresses how we may feel about the treasures of God's Word. A day may come when we will be thrilled because of what we have absorbed of God's Word, yet sad because we had not taken more when we could have.

I have made a covenant with God that He sends me neither visions, dreams, nor even angels. I am well satisfied with the gift of the Holy Scriptures, which give me abundant instruction and all I need to know – both for this life and that which is to come. – Martin Luther