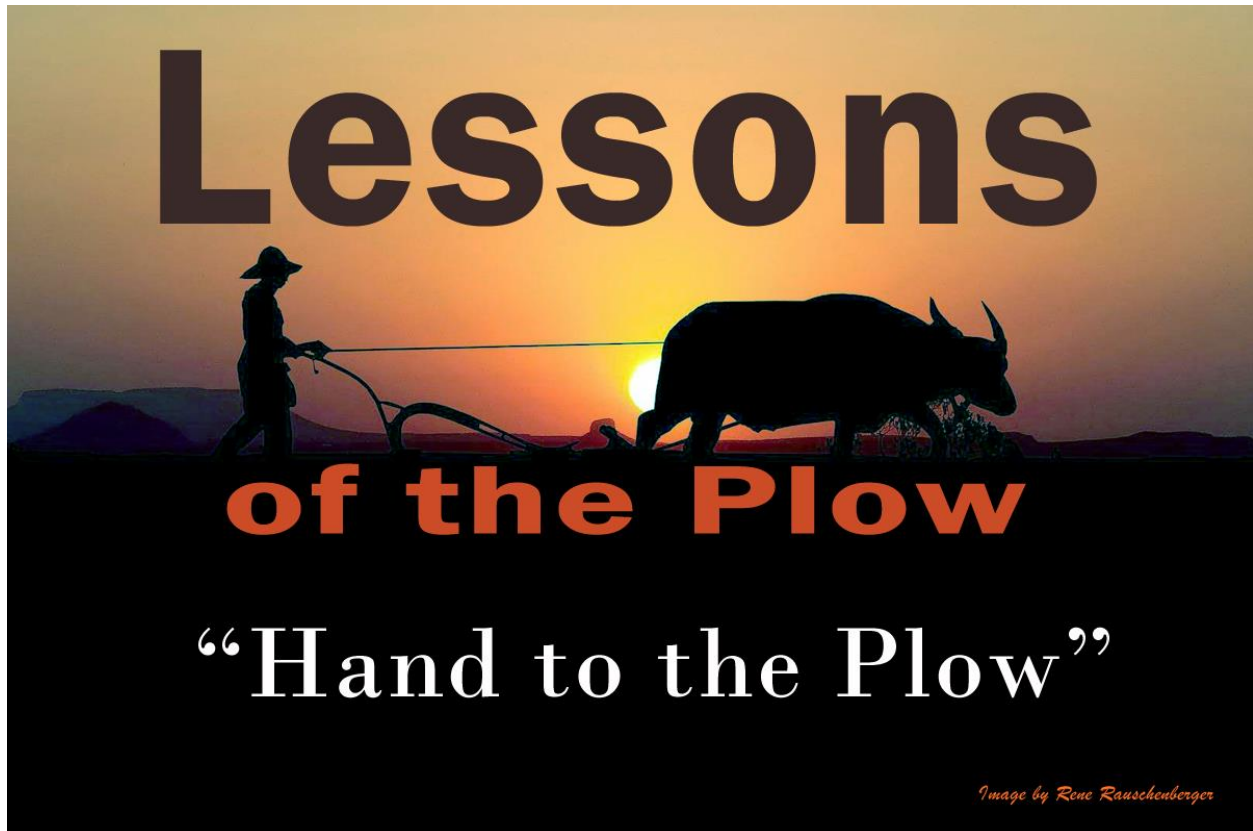


**September 4**

“Hand to the Plow”

Luke 9:62

Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”



**Special Music:** Cécile Andraut - Hold on (Keep your hand on the plow)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iWipFDDNDk>

Hold On. Set Apart Music. Hadarah BatYah. "Negro Spiritual"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68KHGI8\\_txg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68KHGI8_txg)

## **HAND TO THE PLOW**

**It's dawn**

**A rusty sky**

**Begs for the sun to rise.**

**Before me**

**An empty field,**

**Waiting for me to give it purpose.**

**Bartholomule, the mule, snorts,**

**Ready to work.**

**Oh, what a team we make.**

**I take my place,**

**Behind the plow,**

**Back straight, feet planted,**

**Head bowed.**

**There, in the distance,**

**Stands the tree**

**In silhouette against the dawn.**

**The same oak**

**That served my father,**

**His father, and his father before him.**

**Generations of eyes focused**

**Fixed on the Guidestone**

**Before the plow is set.**

**I put my calloused**

**Hand to the plow,**

**And only then**

**Do I flick my lash**

Adding a crack  
To the sound of crickets  
And early morning ribbits.  
Bartholomule leans into the yoke  
Straining against the tack  
As the blade digs  
Into the crusty earth.  
The soil starts to turn  
Revealing black sod beneath  
Blessed by God.  
Fixing my gaze on the oak  
Keeps the furrows straight.  
Through the cool of the morning,  
And the heat of noonday,  
To the warmth of the evening,  
Bartholomule and I labor.  
At the end of the day  
The field has been tilled.  
The smell of freshly turned sod  
Fills the air  
As if to say  
“Lay seeds upon my brow  
For I am primed for planting.”  
Bartholomule and I,  
Partners in perseverance,  
Face the setting sun  
In gratitude  
For an honest day’s work.

**We thank God  
For His grace,  
His yoke,  
And the guidance  
Of His stalwart oak.  
I know that I  
Should never vow  
Or put my hand  
To mule or plow  
Without setting my eyes  
On God's Holy Bough  
To guide me.**

As a weekend farm boy growing up, my dad thought it was important for this city boy to learn to plow. We really didn't plow much because my dad was more into orchards. But he did teach me. I ran a brush hog a lot more than I plowed but the basics were the same. Whether I was plowing or pulling a shredder, my dad taught me to find a fixed point ahead of me and drive that tractor towards it. It was my marker, my focus. It set my bearing. The reasoning was sound. In the heat of East Texas, it was an easy thing to drift off to sleep with the rocking of the tractor. If I didn't stay focused and plow straight, if I drifted off for even a minute, I was likely to wind up in a ditch or, at the very least, make a total wreck of the field. In order to turn the soil, you have to plow. If you want the planter to do its job, then you needed to plow straight. If you wanted the harvester to optimally gather the wheat or vegetables, you had better have plowed straight and consistent. A good harvest was dependent on plowing correctly so that everything was in place for the planting and the harvesting. You can only do that by staying alert and focused.

Although he was only a weekend farmer, my dad could pick up a hand full of freshly tilled soil, smell it, and tell you if it was nitrogen rich or needed more nutrients. He would roll the soil around in his fingers to determine the consistency and the water content. He would taste it to determine how much alkaline was in the dirt. I knew this was a skill that he developed from studying other farmers. His degree in horticultural was also key. But to me, it just seemed

like magic. I love farmers for their total dependence on God's provisions and their commonsense way of understanding life.

I had an elderly neighbor. He was as strong as an ox. He had two beautiful shiny tractors. He also has cows, horses, chickens, pigs, and mules. He preferred to grow his own food for his livestock, but he only grew what he needed, just a couple of acres. The thing was, he wouldn't use his tractors to pull plows when he turned those fields. Instead, he used a mule and a hand plow. While people often said how foolish this was, this old farmer was the strongest man I've ever known and so very thankful to God for that hand plow and that mule. And, I will admit, it's much more difficult to fall asleep if you are driving a mule and a plow than if you are driving a tractor, especially if that tractor is air conditioned.

**“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.**

**Genesis 2:15**

The King James version of that verse says that Adam **“dressed”** the garden while the New Revised Standard Version says **“till.”** What that means is that from the very beginning, humans have been preparing the soil for planting. Whether it was a stick being used to turn the earth over or a 700hp tractor tilling 16 rows at one time, the results are the same. The earth is turned over to bring the hidden nutrients to the surface so that the seeds have the best chance of nourishment

when they are planted. This time of preparation of the soil also takes into consideration the optimization of the nurturing and harvesting of the crops.

Jesus understood farmers. Most of his followers were men who worked with their hands; farmers, fishermen, shepherders, carpenters, stone cutters, and craftsmen. These people lived marginal lives as the cogs in the machinery that fed and sheltered people as well as providing for their needs. I stand in awe of the fact that even with all the other professions that we have today, created by industries that no one could have imagined in 30 AD, the ancient professions still exist as cornerstones in today's society, and while the tools may have changed, so much of the basic processes for these jobs remains the same. Commercial fishermen still use nets. Carpenters still use hammers and saws. Masons still use mallets and chisels. And farmers... well farmers still use plows to turn the earth. Just as they did millennia ago. Farmers still fix their eyes on a single point to ensure that the plow runs straight and true, whether they are turning the earth by hand-plow, a mule, or a tractor.

**Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."**

You can't plow a straight line if you keep looking back over your shoulder. If the plow-person chooses to look behind them, what you wind up with is an ugly mess that is extremely difficult to clean up. When Jesus spoke these words, they rang true with everyone listening. Plowing was something that just about everyone had experienced at some point in their lives, whether it was planting a garden or a large field. They understood the importance of straight furrows.

**They understood that if the earth was not tilled properly, it affected the planting, the weeding, the watering, and even the harvest of the crops. It could also affect the quality of the crops. They knew that it could be a disaster if the person guiding the plow took their eyes off the mark.**

**There are verses in the Bible where the words of Jesus can sound harsh, just like our verse Luke. For example, in Matthew 10:34-39 Jesus says this:**

**34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**

**35 For I have come to turn**

**“ ‘a man against his father,**

**a daughter against her mother,**

**a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—**

**36 a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’**

**(Micah 7:6)**

**37 “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**

**38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**

**39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.**



Sometimes, when we explain the gospel to someone, we are more like people selling cars than discipleship. We talk about the beauty and the wonder of being a Christian and neglect to talk about the things that might discourage a person from making a commitment to Christ. We so want to lead someone into a relationship with Jesus Christ that we hold back on the truth about discipleship. But, by doing that, we are intentionally taking our eyes off the mark, the truth found in message of Christ, and we allow the message to drift. We lead people into believing that a partial commitment to Christ is better than no commitment at all. We seem to think that people will not commit once they find out that the commitment is an “all in” commitment, so we just kind of leave that part out. The big problem with doing this is that coming into a relationship with Christ is a singular event separating our old lives from our new lives. It is a life changing event. It is in that moment when we hit the reset button on our lives and change our guidepost from the carrots that world offers, and take on the mantle of the person and divinity of Jesus Christ. It is the moment when we die to our own selves in order to serve the one who died for us. Not only that, God is all about truth. If we fudge on the truth found in the gospel by omitting what we believe might turn people off, we are not delivering the message of that Christ wants us to deliver. The cross means nothing without the resurrection. And as harsh as this may sound, salvation means nothing if our lives are not changed. People should see the difference in our lives as we move closer to Jesus.

But the commitment can seem like a burden if we do not understand the value in that commitment. When new believers come into the fellowship of Jesus

Christ and His followers, the message can seem heavy, heavier than any human could bear. So, we soften the message. We hesitate to tell people that being a Christian is not a burden-free life. That is sad because our relationship with Christ gives us the strength to handle the storms in life and the ability to put our hand to the plow. Jesus never promised that we would have a life free from storms or hard work. But He did promise us that He would stand with us to see us through those storms and reward our hard work. Why are we so hesitant to explain that to people when we talk about the gospel?

Even the verses in Luke leading into our target verses today are difficult for us to comprehend and accept because they sound so harsh to the ears:

**57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."**

**58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."**

**59 He said to another man, "Follow me."**

**But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."**

**60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."**

**61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."**

**62 Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”**

**Jesus isn't being unkind here. He isn't without compassion. But he wants to make sure that those who step into this relationship with God understand the nature and the cost of following Christ. Once someone has made the commitment and put their hand to the plow to follow Jesus Christ, there is no turning back. It is a commitment higher than any other commitment. Higher than the commitment to friends, coworkers, jobs, education, family, or even the church. A commitment to the church is not a commitment to follow Jesus Christ. But a follower of Jesus Christ will understand the need to build and support the church for the sake of Jesus. Let me reiterate, the commitment is not to the church, but to Christ, and because of that commitment to Jesus, Christians support the church and its mission to bring others into that same relationship that they have experienced.**

**Jesus is our guidepost, the oak tree we fix our eyes on in ministry and discipleship. It is our relationship with Him that keeps us on the right path. Focusing on Him keeps the plow running straight. Fixing our gaze on Him keeps the path true.**

**But what happens when we mess up and take our eyes off that guidepost? If you have spent anytime plowing a field, you will know that you simply cannot back up. If we try doing that, we will probably break the plow. Plows were not meant to run backwards. The only way to fix our mistake is to stop, pick up the**

**plow, and move it back where it needs to be in order to fix the wayward furrows and continue plowing.**

**When we take our eyes off Jesus, and realize how badly we have messed up, we have to stop, lift our plow by praying for forgiveness, and let God help us reset the plow where it needs to be before we continue with the work God has set before us. If we just keep on plowing without taking the time to reset that plow, we will just make things worse. That plow is our heart, and we have to get our heart right in order to do what God wants us to do.**

**This month, we are going to be talking about plowing and what that means for our Christian life. This week, I want us to consider what it means for us to put our hand to the plow. Are we plowing with our eyes fixed on Jesus? If not, are we prepared to stop and reset the plow so we can get back on track? Are we in prayer with regards to how we are plowing?**

**We should rejoice that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to earth so that we have a mighty oak to fix our eyes on as we serve Him. We should be so very thankful for the Holy Spirit to help guide us through our days. We serve a risen savior. We serve an all-knowing God. Let us lean into Jesus and put our hand to the plow.**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

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