

## BLESSED BEGINNINGS

### Luke 4:14-15

"Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread throughout the entire vicinity. <sup>15</sup> He was teaching in their synagogues, being acclaimed by everyone."

#### INTRODUCTION

In 1846, John Geddie left the pastorate of a church in Nova Scotia, Canada, to take his wife and two small children to the South Sea Islands to begin mission work there. They spent eight months in Samoa learning the language to familiarize them with the South Sea dialect. In July, 1848, after a voyage of over 10,000 miles, they arrived in the New Hebrides Islands at Aneityum (southernmost island of the modern nation of Vanuatu; 1,000 miles east of Australia). This island chain teemed with cannibals. More than 20 crew members of a British ship were killed and eaten just months before the Geddies arrived at Aneityum, populated by 12,000 natives. They faced difficulties of learning a language with no written form, tropical storms, strange new diseases, and constant threat of being slain. As Geddie went through the forests and mountains on evangelistic tours, stones, clubs and spears were hurled at him; several times he was injured. Another couple arrived in 1857 to assist their mission's effort. They were killed by the natives in 1861.

John and his wife, Charlotte, prepared well for their daunting task. After receiving missionary appointment in 1845, Geddie spent the next year at a local newspaper office learning to operate a printing press, which he took with him. He studied rudiments of house building and shipbuilding. He learned to identify and treat tropical diseases and acquired medicines, which his wife, a Dr.'s daughter, had skills to dispense. At age 19, John Geddie exultantly experienced God's saving grace. The Geddies were devoted to a deeply personal and prayerful walk with the Lord, and gained a thorough grasp of the Bible. Their preparation sparked the blessed beginning of the Good News of **Jesus Christ** being savingly embraced by a pagan people. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Geddie reported 10 attended his services. Soon, many responded to the Gospel. His wife attempted to discourage some of the natives' godless customs. To prevent their habit of strangling a widow and her children too young to care for themselves, Charlotte often took a widow into her home. Geddie faithfully continued his ministry, including translating the entire Bible into the native language, which he first had to learn and develop an alphabet for, and planting twenty-five churches and many schools throughout the island. Geddie also toured neighboring islands settling native teachers and describing the wondrous changes wrought by the Gospel on Aneityum. Delegations visiting Aneityum reported the astounding and miraculous changes they witnessed, which prepared their own islands for the reception of the Word of Life. In the pulpit of the church Geddie pastored for many years, which became the largest missions' church in the Southern Hemisphere, a plaque honored his memory. It stated: "When he landed in 1848, there were no Christians here, and when he left in 1872 there were no heathen."

Twenty-two earlier sermons from **Luke** emphasized how well God the Father carefully planned and guided every aspect of the birth and development of **Jesus Christ**; God's Son come to earth as the Messiah foretold by Scripture. We've explored the thorough preparation our fully human Savior underwent prior to beginning His ministry to deliver us from eternal death and the penalty and power of our sins, and restore us to the remarkable privilege of spending eternity with God's family in Heaven. Today's message, Blessed Beginnings, highlights seven factors enabling "the man Christ Jesus" (**I Timothy 2:5**, CSB) to succeed in His crucial tasks and overcome obstacles that could have otherwise defeated Him and sunk us! **Luke 4:14-15** describes the blessed beginning of the ministry for which **Jesus** prepared Himself for 30+ years: "Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread throughout the entire vicinity. He was teaching in their synagogues, being acclaimed by everyone." **Jesus** burst upon Israel's scene like a breath of the Spirit of the living God. Whenever we are planning any major undertaking—personal, career, family, educational, ministry, or other project—**Jesus** provides us with a model for success.

**I. PARENTS** (obedience to God-given authorities). As a child and young man, **Jesus** learned to give God the Father the absolute obedience that would be required of Him as the Messiah by yielding His will in obedience to His earthly authorities, especially His parents. **Luke 2:41-52** reveals **Jesus** at age 12 is now aware of His Divine identity as "the Son of the Most High" (**Luke 1:32**), which Joseph and Mary, His earthly parents, knew before His birth. **Jesus** believes He has God the "Father's" blessing to remain awhile at the Temple in Jerusalem rather than returning home with His parents immediately after Passover. When Mary and Joseph object, **Luke 2:51** tells us, "Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them." The Greek word for "obedient" describes **Jesus** as deliberately placing Himself under His parents' God-given authority. Realization of His awesome identity as the Son of God did not fill Him with prideful contempt of His merely human parents. **Jesus** made no demand of them to be given more control of His life. Though He was the perfect Son of God, He was also the perfect son of Joseph & Mary.

A teenager wrote to advice columnist Ann Landers: "I am a 15 year old and my biggest problem is my mother. All she does is nag, nag, nag. From morning till night. It is, turn off the TV. Do your homework. Wash behind your neck. Stand up straight. Go clean your room. How can I get her off my case?" (signed) Pick, Pick, Pick. Ann Landers replied: "Dear Picky: Turn off the TV. Do your homework. Wash behind your neck. Stand up straight. Go clean up your room." Pastor Chuck Swindoll once spent an evening with former Astronaut Charles M. Duke, who piloted the Apollo 16 crew landing on the moon April 16, 1972. Swindoll asked Duke, "Once you were there, weren't you free to make your own decisions and carry out some of your own experiments; sort of do as you pleased if you liked?" Duke smiled back, "Sure, Chuck, if we didn't want to return to earth." He then described the intricate plan, the precise instructions, the essential discipline, & the instant obedience needed down to the split second for the success of the lunar mission. Swindoll later commented, "I got the distinct impression that a rebel doesn't fit inside a spacesuit. Whoever represents the United States in the space program must have an unconditional respect for authority." Is this even more true of anyone who represents almighty God in the mission of taking people to Heaven?

**II. PREPARATION**(education and training). After **Jesus** returned obediently to Nazareth with His parents, **Luke 2:52** tells us, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people." The Greek word for "increased" was used of pioneers purposely forging ahead in exploring and discovering new lands. Luke presents to us a word picture of **Jesus** purposely growing in knowledge of God's will and of the world around Him, in developing His physical strength, and learning how to interact productively with God and with people. In other words, Luke is telling us **Jesus** took responsibility for His development. He acquired the training to be fully ready for His mission on earth as God's Messiah and our Savior. If we leap prematurely into serious responsibility, the results can be disastrous. A woman visitor to a major city entered a taxicab. No sooner was the door closed than the cab suddenly leaped forward and went racing wildly along the street; narrowly missing collision with innumerable things. The passenger, naturally enough, was terrified. She thrust her head through the open window of the door, and shouted at the chauffeur: "Please, be careful, sir! I'm nervous. This is the first time I ever rode in a taxi." Without turning his head, the driver yelled back, "Ma'am, I'm nervous too. It's the first time I ever drove one!"

**III. PRACTICAL LIFE SKILLS.** This factor overlaps the last one. The response of **Jesus'** hometown crowd, when He returned to Nazareth on a ministry stop, is revealing. **Mark 6:3**: "Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses [Joseph], Judas, and Simon? And aren't His sisters here with us?" **Jesus** was not a socially awkward nerd or an impractical mystic who lived in isolation prior to presenting Himself to the world as the Messiah. He knew the rigors of hard, physical work and the responsibilities of family life, among other practical life skills that prepared Him to succeed in His mission.

**IV. PATIENCE.** "Patience is a virtue; possess it if you can. Found seldom in a woman; never in a man"; so says Jonathan Morris in his book, *The Way of Serenity*. Christian humorist Barbara Johnson, adds, "Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears."

Englishman G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945), the premier Bible teacher of Great Britain *and* America of his day, believed in the crucial importance of patience for Christ's followers; of not launching into important activities until we gain assurance it's God's will to proceed. "Waiting for God is not laziness," Morgan states. "Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given." If anyone would have thought He was ready to launch into His life's work, it would have been the Son of God in the flesh as He entered His 20's. People all around Him, many of whom were beloved friends or family members, were suffering the ravages of disease, sinful impulses, and death, which He alone could begin to reverse. Yet, other than normal acts of personal kindness or wise counseling, He did nothing to invoke God's supernatural power through Him. Instead, He waited, and waited, and waited—day-after-day, night after night—with His desire for activity under command of His Father, awaiting new orders from God the Father, and with the full awareness His ministry needed to be fully God-led and God-empowered, or His best human efforts would fail. In **John 5:19** (NLT), "Jesus explained, 'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself. He does only what He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.'" Did **Jesus** demonstrate remarkable patience? Yes! **Luke 3:23** tells us, "As He began His ministry, Jesus was about 30 years old."

**V. PRAYER.** **Luke 5:15-16** reveals an important discipline **Jesus** practiced that He learned before beginning His ministry: "The news about Him spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses.<sup>16</sup> Yet He often withdrew to deserted places and prayed." Scottish author and Bible teacher William Barclay (1907-78) wrote, "When we pray, remember three things: 1. The love of God that wants the best for us. 2. The wisdom of God that knows what is best for us. 3. The power of God that can accomplish it." E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973), a Methodist missionary and author, states, "Prayer is surrender—surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will. If I throw out a boathook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God."

**VI. POWER.** **Luke 4:1-2a, 13-14** make it emphatically clear **Jesus** relied fully upon the power of God the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work for the Kingdom of God: "Then Jesus returned from the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness<sup>2</sup> for 40 days to be tempted by the Devil.<sup>3</sup> After the Devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him for a time.<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread throughout the entire vicinity.<sup>15</sup> He was teaching in their synagogues, being acclaimed by everyone." **Romans 15:13** reveals we should rely upon and count upon the Holy Spirit to empower us in our own lives, as well: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

**VII. PRIORITY OF GOD'S WORD.** To deal with Satan's temptations of **Luke 4:1-12**, how did **Jesus** answer the Devil each time? He quoted what "is written" in God's Word. **Jesus** stated the priority He gave to God's Old Testament Word in **Matthew 5:17-19**: "'Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.<sup>18</sup> For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches people to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'" **II Timothy 3:16-17** (NLT) underscores the priority Christians should give to all of God's Word: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.<sup>17</sup> God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work." William Gurnall (1616-79), an English Puritan preacher, wrote, "When people do not mind what God speaks to them in His Word, God does as little mind what they say to Him in prayer." In other words, the more seriously we listen to what God is speaking to us in the Bible, the more seriously God listens to us when we speak to Him in prayer.

## CONCLUSION

Clarence Jordan was born in 1912 to prominent white parents in a small town 60 miles south of Atlanta. **Jesus** claimed his heart and life at age 12. As a youth, he was troubled by the racial and economic injustice he saw in his community. "But what could one person do to change things?" he began asking God. Hoping to improve the lot of sharecroppers through scientific farming techniques, he earned a degree in agriculture in 1933 from the University of Georgia. During his college years, Clarence Jordan became convinced the roots of poverty were spiritual, not just economic. God led him to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, where he earned a Ph.D. in the Greek New Testament in 1938. He possessed such abilities he could do nearly anything. He chose to serve the poor. In 1942, Clarence and Florence Jordan, along with former American Baptist missionaries Martin and Mabel England, founded Koinonia Farm on 440 bleak acres in Americus, Georgia (100 miles south of Atlanta), named for the Greek word *κοινωνία* often translated "fellowship" or "communion" in the New Testament. "*Κοινωνία*" is the bond between individuals sharing a common interest and a mutual, active participation in the welfare of each other. Jordan called Koinonia Farm a "demonstration plot for the kingdom of God," where a community of believers shares their lives and resources. Other families soon joined, and visitors to the farm were invited "to serve a period of apprenticeship in developing community life on the teachings and principles of Jesus."

Koinonia Farm became a thriving a community giving a foretaste of Heaven to mostly poor whites and poor blacks laboring in love together. This did not go over well in the Deep South of the '40s. Ironically, much resistance came from "good church people" who followed the laws of segregation as much as other town folk. They tried everything to stop the blessed beginning of Jordan's Christ-inspired mission, including boycotting the Farm's products or slashing the workers' tires when they came to town. By 1954, the Ku Klux Klan had enough of Clarence Jordan and his interracial community. They came hooded one night with guns and torches and set fire to every building on Koinonia Farm but Jordan's home, which they riddled with bullets. They succeeded in chasing off everyone but one black family that refused to leave. Jordan recognized the voices of many of the Klansmen, including some who were church people. He also recognized the voice of a local newspaper reporter.

The next day, this reporter came to see what remained of the farm. The rubble still smoldered and the land was scorched, but he found Jordan in the field, hoeing and planting. "I heard the awful news," the reporter called to Jordan, "and I came out to do a story on the tragedy of your farm closing." Jordan just kept on hoeing and planting. The reporter kept prodding, kept poking, trying to get a rise from this quietly determined man who seemed to be planting instead of packing his bags. Finally, he said mockingly, "Well, Dr. Jordan, you got two of them PhD's and you've put 14 years into this farm, and there's nothing left of it at all. Just how successful do you think you've been?" Jordan stopped his hoeing, turned his penetrating eyes on the reporter, and said quietly but firmly, "About as successful as the Cross. Sir, I don't think you understand us. What we are about is not success but faithfulness. We're staying. Good day."

Beginning that day, Jordan and his biracial companions rebuilt the Koinonia Farm and its Christ-centered community, which is still going strong today. The web site, <https://www.koinoniafarm.org/> states, "Through our renewed commitment to the Gospel today, we seek to Feed the Hungry both physically and spiritually. In 2008, we recommitted to farming as a way of life. We grow a variety of natural produce, pecans, grass-fed beef, and other livestock. Through our ministry of hospitality, countless individuals are renewed and transformed. Our internship program is thriving, with people of all ages and backgrounds coming to explore Christian community and discipleship. Come join us!" Blessed beginnings, built upon God-centered preparation, can lead to enduring, transforming, and Christ-inspired results!