

NO EASY BUTTON
September 28, 2014 –Matthew 7: 7-14
The Church of the Covenant

Miss Jean Steel was a retired elementary school teacher, prim and proper, who was into her 90's, in the very first church I served when I was in seminary as a student assistant. There was a chain across the driveway of the lower church parking lot and she was making her way, decided to step over the chain rather than to take the well-worn path to the one side and promptly fell. I happened to see it, ran over to help, and blurted out, "Miss Steel, why didn't you go around the chain instead of over it?" I was about to receive a lecture that I have remembered for the rest of my life. She began, "Young man..." and proceeded to point out how there were "no short cuts in life...anything worth doing was worth doing well...she would rather fall down than to take the easy path..." I had gone over to help and had received a life lesson. According to Miss Steel there is no such thing as an "easy button", Staples business supply store, notwithstanding. Old teachers never die...nor do they fade away...they just serve up their best lectures for young seminarians...

Sometimes people view their faith like its an "easy button". Jesus died and paid a price so I don't have to. God has done for me what I cannot do for myself so that means I don't have to do anything. I "joined church" when I was 14, mission accomplished. I went forward at a Billy Graham Crusade in 1993, task completed. There is no obligation I owe God for what Jesus Christ has done for me. Indeed, I can order God around in my prayer life, telling HIM what He needs to do. I will get mad at God when HE does not do what I want HIM to do. I cheapen the grace I have received. I forget that there was nothing cheap about the death that has set me free. No, Jesus suffered and bled and died for me and my salvation. Jesus took no shortcuts. He went to the cross. He paid the ultimate price. No "easy button" for Jesus. The duty of the Christian, rather, is our Bible theme for this fall –"*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind*". (Luke 10:27). Not part of your heart, not part of your soul, not just part of your strength, not just part of your mind –Rather, ALL of it. Jesus paid it ALL and Jesus wants ALL our love in return. It may take a brief moment to receive Jesus. But it takes a lifetime of "Learning to Love God" to know HIM, love HIM and serve HIM. People want there to be an "easy button" where their faith is concerned. Thank you, Miss Steel, for reminding me at the beginning there is no shortcut in the important things in life, no "easy button" where Jesus is concerned...

Jesus is preaching in the Sermon on the Mount in our scripture for today. He declares: "*Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction.*" He is saying the "easy button" way is not the way of the Christian and not the way of the cross. And then He concludes: "*For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*" (Matthew 7: 13-14) There is a pathway that is laid out for us in life by God. There is a sovereign plan by a Sovereign God that is uniquely set before us. How are we to know the way? "*I am the way...*" says Jesus (John 14: 7) This plan is there to bless us; it is there to sustain us; it is there to lead us to LIFE, as Jesus says. Life in this life and eternal life in the next life. But it is narrow and hard, not wide and easy. Not all paths lead to eternal life. We enter through Jesus Christ alone; He who declares of Himself, "*I am the door...*" And then we are to walk the path He has set before us; because that pathway leads to life. It is a beautiful plan; it is a remarkable life to which we are called; it is the best life of all and a life which has us look in the mirror and be pleased with what God has done in our life. Blessedness comes from walking the narrow way, and following the Sovereign Plan, which He has set before us.

The sin of America today is one which says: "I want what I want, when I want it, how I want it, and I want it NOW." Self-will is not God's will. Determining one's own path in life is not the narrow way.

Either our own EGO sits on the throne of our life or God's Holy presence does. Either we are directed by EGO and self-will or we are directed by God and God's will. Repentance is a great concept. Not the beating oneself up kind; not the "I am a miserable dog sinner" kind; not the kind that is wounding or intrinsically negative to who we are; not the kind that pushes us down, rather, the kind that lifts us up. Repentance in its purest sense only means to TURN. That's what "repent" means. It means to turn. It means to turn away from MY EGO and to turn toward God. It means to turn away from my will and it means to pray "Thy will be done." It means, "It is NOT what I want, when I want it, how I want it, and I want it NOW". It means, "It is what YOU want God; it is Your plan and Your will for my life." It means my plan for my life is so caught up in my own EGO that I know that Your plan for my life must be far, far better. When we are frustrated or angry or empty or whatever, we know we have gotten off the path, we have let our own EGO get in the way and we need to get back on the path, back on the Sovereign plan, we need to turn away from something and we need to turn toward (not some-thing) but some-ONE. This is on an almost daily basis. It is always amazing to me how wrong I am and about so many things. I am wrong about people. Often the most frustrating person is the very person whom God has sent to teach me something. I am wrong about ideas and thoughts and plans. It is funny how subtle my own EGO is to have me really think and believe that MY PLAN is God's Plan, when it isn't. Most of my prayer life any more is God showing me how wrong I am and how my EGO is always battling God's will and how I need to turn from this attitude or that thought back to HIM. Repentance isn't a one shot deal at a crusade; it's a lifetime of turning away from one's own EGO and turning toward the One, true and living God. Life is a whole series of "TURNINGS", of getting back on the path, of weekly, daily, sometimes it seems hourly, reconnecting with that Sovereign Plan of God what seeks to bless us in life. And that's HARD, not EASY. I don't want to be wrong. I don't want to be out of synch with God's plan. I don't want to be wrong in my judgment of people or events. I want to be right. I want to want what I want when I want it, how I want it, and I want it NOW. No EASY BUTTON WITH GOD. No, the gate is narrow and the way is hard. It requires a relentless seeking and searching, of bringing the light of God's truth to shine almost mercilessly on the motivations of our heart, and of learning some things about ourselves we would rather not know, and of learning some things about God that we need to know. That's what learning to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind is all about. The hard path and the narrow gate gets us to a place where, its not "I want what I want", rather its, "I want to want what God wants". You may trust me on this –merely pushing an "easy button" doesn't get you there...

Recently, I prayed the closing prayer at the Franklin Graham Festival of Faith. I didn't want to do it. As funny as it may seem to you I really don't like getting up in front of crowds and speaking, let alone praying. I like a much more behind the scenes kind of role. This is very hard for me. I don't want to be out in front of people. I am basically a pretty shy person. My idea of fun is sitting at home in my comfy chair, watching TV, maybe reading a book, and quietly falling asleep in the comfy chair. That's what I want. And I knew in my heart there would be no podium at the festival to hide some cheat sheet with notes on it for my prayer. Nothing to hide behind, just me on a stage and 10,000 people. And I knew that it would ruin for me the whole Festival, worrying and kavetching around about it. I kavetched around about it for TWO MONTHS, not just two days. And then I found out that Bishop Zubik of the Roman Catholic Church was doing the opening prayer, so I would be following the Bishop and Franklin Graham. And then I found out that the famous contemporary singer, Michael W. Smith, would be immediately following me. GREAT. Just wonderful. Don't want to do it. Just let me fall asleep in the comfy chair, O Lord. That's what I want, when I want it, how I want it, and I want it NOW. Nope. Had to TURN. Had to TURN to God. Had to get over myself and get into God. Had to get over what I want and get into what God wants. Had to plumb the depths of why I felt unworthy to pray publically. Had to learn some things about myself I'd rather not know. Had to trust God a lot more than I wanted. Not my

words, not my prayer; its Your words and Your prayer, Lord. No easy button. No hiding away. Narrow gate and hard path to follow Jesus.

The second INVOLVEMENT DAY is today and it would be easy to pass by the sign up tables in the Commons Area without a second glance. I don't have time, you may say. I don't see why my stepping out in faith is important, you may say. I'd rather sleep in the comfy chair on Sunday than have to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul and strength and mind. I'd rather take my salvation in Jesus and just go home. I have a plan, Lord Jesus, for my life. I want what I want. Maybe I really don't want to learn what it means to be "Learning to Love God". Janet Nevin had an "easy button" in her office and for this sermon she gave me that easy button and here it is. Maybe we need to turn; turn away from our own self-will and turn toward God. Maybe we need to give up our easy button and see the narrow way and the hard path Jesus trod for us... Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*