

25 July 2018

Life Seminar: Disciple

Session Three: What Does a Disciple Do? General Aspects

In Philippians 3:2-11 Paul describes his greatest joy and goal in life: to know and be like Christ. This heartfelt cry of the Apostle of the Gentiles *should* echo our own hearts' desires. This passage really sums up the general aspects of what disciples do: know and be like Jesus. In his masterful work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer gives two warnings about this idea of knowing and being like Jesus:

1. "One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of him."
2. "One can know a great deal about godliness without much knowledge of God."<sup>1</sup>

We have already established the fact that disciples are followers. Additionally, we noted that disciples are follower *of Jesus*. Jesus is our rabbi, and we are his *talmidim*. We covered what disciples believe last week, looking at how doctrine informs our lives. We covered the major tenets of the Christian faith, as represented in the Apostles' Creed, which all disciples believe.

For the next three lessons we are looking at what this looks like *practically*. This lesson will cover the general aspects, and next week will cover the specific aspects.

Our lesson this evening will follow a simple outline consisting of three main thoughts. We will distill the amazing truths each thought has, and then should time allow, open it up for questions and discussions.

Our main thoughts are these:

- I. The Goal: To Know and Be Like Christ
- II. The Spiritual Disciplines: The Tool to Make Us Like Christ
- III. Church Membership: The Greenhouse for Growth

The main theme of this evening's lesson is our Goal: To Know and Be Like Christ.

- I. The Goal: To Know and Be Like Christ

Philippians 3:2-11

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 26.

John 17:22-23- Jesus' high priestly prayer: Jesus desires us to be so united with him that people see the Father and the Father's love in us

Romans 8:28-29- God uses everything to work good in the life of his children, for the purpose of molding them into Christlikeness

1 Corinthians 15:49- Our likeness after Adam points to our likeness in Christ

2 Corinthians 3:12-18-Through the redemptive work of Christ, believers enjoy an "unveiled" reading of the Scriptures, and by consuming the Scriptures enjoy ongoing change into the image of Christ

1 John 3:1-3- John speaks on the ignorance of the world concerning God and his children, and then addresses the incredible transformation that we will enjoy at the last

2 Peter 3:14-18- In Peter's final written words in the New Testament, he commands his readers to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ

There are, of course, many other passages of Scripture that inform the Christian's highest privilege and greatest obligation. There is one more passage that I think offers a perfect summary of the thoughts of these Holy writers, that will form a perfect segue into our goal.

Matthew 22:34-40- Jesus summarizes the 39 books of the Old Testament, and the 613 commands (if we are to trust the counting of Rabbi Moses Maimonides [Rambam]) in two commands: love God and love neighbor. Or, to put it another way, to know and be like Christ. The first command, to love God, is found in Deuteronomy 6:5. This is called the *Shema*, which the faithful Jewish person recites several times a day (depending upon one's views of Judaism).

Hear the words of Rabbi J. H. Hertz, "This is the first instance in human history that the *love* of God was demanded in any religion. The love of God is the distinctive mark of His true

worshippers. The worshipper, as he declares the Unity of God, thereby lovingly and unconditionally surrenders his mind and heart to God's holy will. Such spiritual surrender is called 'taking upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.' מלכות שמים קבלת עול. If the Unity of God is the basis of the Jewish creed, the love of God is to be the basis of the Jewish life. And the noblest spiritual surrender and love of God, the Rabbis held, was so to live and act toward our fellowmen as the make God and His Torah *beloved* in their eyes."<sup>2</sup> That is, the goal of the faithful Jewish person was to know and be like God. Of course, as we read in 2 Corinthians, they had (and have) that veil over their eyes, and they are unable to see the beautiful Messiah Jesus. We must remember Paul's warning in Romans 11:17-22.

The goal of the Christian, then, is to know and be like Christ. J. I. Packer asks this convicting question, "Have we ever formed the holy habit of contemplating Jesus in solitude, allowing Scripture passage after Scripture passage to show us his many-sided glory and to draw us out in the many-angled adoration that is our proper response?"<sup>3</sup> Or, let me ask this question, "Have we ever desired to share the sweet Savior, who was beaten and mocked and died for our sins, knowing of his dearness, his delightfulness, and wanting others to experience it?" Or, another question, "Have our lives reflected that we truly desire and know the sovereign, holy, righteous God?"

Our goal, then, is to know and be like Jesus Christ. How do we know Jesus more and be like him? Besides the normal answer, "Read your Bible and pray every day" we are going to look at a generic, yet detailed view of *how*.

## II. The Spiritual Disciplines: The Tools to Make Us Like Christ- 1 Timothy 4:6-10

Before we dive into the actual disciplines by which God has equipped us to increase our Christlikeness, I want to look at a few other passages of Scripture that help inform our thinking about spiritual *disciplines*.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs: Hebrew Text, English Translation, and Commentary* (London, EN: Soncino Press, 1937), 770.

<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, as cited in Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), ix.

1 Timothy 6:11- Paul, instructing Timothy, commands him to avoid the wickedness he describes in 3-10. Additionally, he tells Timothy to “pursue” the good. The idea behind the word *pursue* is one of intensity. It is used of persecution, or of zeal. In other words, it is *not a complacent word*. There is intensity, purposefulness, behind Paul’s exhortation to young Timothy.

Acts 24:16- Paul does his best (makes great effort, expends energy) to maintain a clear conscience.

Titus 2:11-15- God’s grace has appeared to train us. The idea behind the word “training” is one of instruction and correction. That is, God’s grace and salvation has appeared to instruct us (train, teach) to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, etc.

Hebrews 5:11-14- The author of Hebrews discusses the lack of spiritual maturity and the failure of his hearers to apprehend the truths he was expounding.

2 Peter 1:3-11- Peter encourages his readers to grow, and that stagnation brings forgetfulness and may even indicate an unregenerate soul.

We see, then, from the Scripture that we are to discipline ourselves. The spiritual disciplines, are, as Don Whitney defines them, “those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to write, “The Spiritual Disciplines are the God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness.”<sup>5</sup> Then Whitney makes an interesting point,

“Godly people are disciplined people. It has always been so. Call to mind some heroes of church history—Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Bunyan, Susanna Wesley, George Whitefield, Lady Huntingdon, Jonathan and Sarah Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, George Muller—they were all disciplined people. In my own pastoral and personal Christian experience, I can say that I’ve never known a man or woman who came to spiritual maturity

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<sup>4</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 1991), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 17.

except through discipline. Godliness comes through discipline.”<sup>6</sup>

To put it another way, we cannot know and be like Jesus unless we are disciplined. What are the disciplines? Let’s look at each one briefly.

#### A. Scripture

We have already touched on this in our first session, but I will highlight the points once again for our review:

1.A disciple hears the Word of God (Luke 8:21; 11:28; Romans 10:17; 1 Timothy 4:13)

2.A disciple reads the Word of God (Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 119:18)

3.A disciple meditates on the Word of God (Psalm 1:1-3; Joshua 1:8)

4.A disciple obeys the Word of God (John 14:15; James 1:22)

#### B. Prayer

Prayer is the incredible communication between sinful people and an all-powerful Creator. I love how John Piper describes it, “Prayer is the coupling of primary and secondary causes. It is the splicing of our limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven. How astonishing it is that God wills to do His work through people. It is doubly astonishing that He ordains to fulfill His plans by being asked to do so by us. God loves to bless His people. But even more He loves to do it in answer to prayer.”<sup>7</sup>

I love that. Prayer is a unique business that finite man and the infinite God work, all

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 53.

according to the beautiful and sovereign will of God. We could spend time discussing *how* to pray, and perhaps we will have time to do so at the end. I'd also recommend looking at the topic section of *Desiring God* for prayer. There are descriptions, methods, sermons, and additional resources on prayer. I'd also recommend working through E. M. Bounds' book *On Prayer*. It will still your soul to spend more time communicating with our Heavenly Father.

We think we are too busy to pray, but this is completely reversed. One of my personal heroes is William Wilberforce. He literally changed the world. This is what he had to say about the importance of prayer, "This perpetual hurry of business and company ruins me in soul if not in body. More solitude and earlier hours! I suspect I have been allotting habitually too little time to religious exercises, as private devotion and religious meditation, Scripture-reading, etc. Hence, I am lean and cold and hard. I had better allot two hours or an hour and a half daily. I have been keeping too late hours, and hence have had but a hurried half-hour in the morning to myself. Surely, the experience of all good men confirms the proposition that without a due measure of private devotions the soul will grow lean. But all may be done through prayer—almighty prayer, I am ready to say—and why not? For that it is almighty is only through the gracious ordination of the God of loving truth. On then, pray, pray, pray!"<sup>8</sup>

C. Fasting- Acts 13:2; 14:23; Exodus 34:28

Richard Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline*, describes this about fasting, "The list of biblical personages who fasted reads like a 'Who's Who' of Scripture: Moses the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, Esther the queen, Daniel the seer, Anna the prophetess, Paul the apostle, Jesus Christ the incarnate Son."<sup>9</sup>

I think we all have a good idea of what fasting is. However, Whitney has a great definition, "A biblical definition of fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 116.

<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, Revised Edition* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 1988), 48.

for spiritual purposes.”<sup>10</sup>

#### D. Giving- Matthew 6:2-4; Acts 9:36; 10:2; James 2:15-16

Giving is such a key part of the Scriptures, and one is overwhelmed at the generosity of the churches in the book of Acts and 2 Corinthians. Giving is an integral part of being a Christian. I love how Chuck Swindoll captures the *Christ-ness* of giving (what he calls sacrifice), “No other discipline is more closely associated with the character and the mission of Jesus Christ than sacrifice....It is a sacrifice that distinguishes the Son of God from all mere historical figures and identifies Him as Savior—even to those who scarcely know of Him.”<sup>11</sup>

#### E. Summary

There are many other disciplines that are found in various works. For example, Whitney, whom I quoted, lists: Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning.<sup>12</sup> Richard J. Foster divides his into: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Swindoll lists the following: intimacy, simplicity, silence and solitude, surrender, prayer, humility, self-control, and sacrifice. Of course, we have already read Peter’s encouragement in 2 Peter 1:3-10 which includes even more options. The point of all of this is not to overwhelm you with “one more thing to do.” The point of all the disciplines is, as Peter best expresses, “They keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8).

### III. Church Membership: The Greenhouse for Growth- Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 10:24

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<sup>10</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 160.

<sup>11</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *So, You Want To Be Like Christ? Eight Essentials To Get You There* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 169.

<sup>12</sup> See the content page of Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*.

<sup>13</sup> See the content page of Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

## **Do you think the Bible addresses church membership?**

Church membership has gone by the wayside in contemporary Christianity. We have bought into the idea that business models and pragmatism should drive the church. Many churches are built around what the community wants. Now, I am sure that many pastors have good desires, and would love to see their churches reach out to the community. I am all for outreach, as are the Scriptures. However, a great disservice has occurred with the topic of church membership. Jonathan Leeman states this in his book on church membership, “If you are a Christian living in a Western democracy, chances are that you need to change the way you think about your church and how you are connected to it. Most likely, you underestimate your church. You belittle it. You misshape it in a way that misshapes your Christianity.”<sup>14</sup>

As Leeman points out, church membership is not: a club, a voluntary organization, or a friendly group of people with similar religious interests.<sup>15</sup> Rather, church membership is membership in “the local church [which] is the authority on earth that Jesus has instituted to officially affirm and give shape to my Christian life and yours.”<sup>16</sup> A church is “primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God’s grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.”<sup>17</sup>

We will quickly look through a few passages of Scripture that will help us see how membership works in the Scriptures and then finish with some substantial reasons why church membership is important from Mark Dever.

### *A General Stroll Through Acts*

Acts 1:15- they knew how many were in their membership

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How The World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Leeman, *Church Membership*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church: New and Expanded Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 149.



Acts 2:42-47- through the regular ministry of the church (preaching, fellowship, observance of ordinances [2:41], and prayer) the church experienced a growth in their membership through God

Acts 4:4- after believing the individuals joined and were about five thousand

Acts 6:1-7- the elders were unable to fulfill their preaching/teaching office, so they appointed congregationally-appointed deacons to administer to the poor in the church

#### *A Particular Look at Specific Churches*

1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 5:1-2; and 6:1-8

Galatians 1:1-2

Philippians 1:1

Revelation 2-3- Church at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

#### Reasons to Join A Church

- A. "To assure ourselves"- John 14:21; 15:10, 14; 13:17
- B. "To evangelize the world"- Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20
- C. "To expose false Gospels"- Matthew 16:18; Galatians 1:8-9; Acts 20:28-32
- D. "To edify the church"- Hebrews 10:19-25<sup>18</sup>

Dever summarizes the thoughts of the New Testament on church membership, writing, "Church membership is our opportunity to grasp hold of each other in responsibility and

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<sup>18</sup> Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church*, 150-156.

love. By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the pastors and other members of that local church know that we intend to be committed in attendance, giving, prayer, and service. We allow fellow believers to have greater expectations of us in these areas, and we make it known that we are the responsibility of this local church. We assure the church of our commitment to Christ in serving with them, and we call for their commitment to serve and encourage us as well.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Recommended Resources*

#### *Books*

J. Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ: The Person and Work of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1971)

Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015)

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993)

John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (New York, NY: Multnomah Books, 2003)

E. M. Bounds, *E. M. Bounds On Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997)

Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How The World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012)

Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church: New and Expanded Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004)

#### *Articles*

On prayer: <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/prayer#>

#### *Websites*

Desiring God

9 Marks

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 157.

