
01 Genuine Decipleship: Introduction

It is a New Year! Someone sent me A New Year's Hope for our Troubled Times.

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die. [last 3 years difficult with Covid etc]

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true. [these words became the verses of a hymn]

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more,
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care the sin, [even mentioning sin!]
The faithless coldness of the times; [Christ spoke of love growing cold]
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes, [and would he find faith when he comes?]
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right, [isn't it time to ring in love of truth and right?]
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be. [Ring in the CHRIST!]

This poem, written in 1850 by Alfred Lloyd Tenneyson, is just as pertinent today as he calls for the restoration of integrity, dignity, and morality. It can be found on the web [here](#).

Integrity is one of the many topics we will be covering in this series. Integrity comes from the word integer, meaning “one” or wholeness. Integrity is when the inside and outside of a person’s life match. What we believe and who we are, what we say and what we do need to match. In our culture we see so much deceit, our culture is the image of the verse that says, “every man is a liar”.

[“Here lies Joe” joke]

Change is Possible at Any Age

Our focus is on Genuine Discipleship, Growth to Maturity, and Transformation. You may be thinking how am I possibly going to change at my age? Perhaps you have been dealing with the same issues for many years. I submit that, in general, the church has not addressed the issue of transformation from a biblical perspective.

A lot of what we will cover in this series is found in the Church Epistles. The Gospels can teach us much about Christ and salvation. But the epistles enable us to understand how transformation and change can take place.

Decision Magazine – Billy Graham Foundation

Franklin and Will Graham are doing the work of evangelists. They hold large meetings, and many many people are being saved, which is great. But what comes next? What happens to these people once they are saved? Do these people grow to maturity in Christ?

Why do people get saved? They have a need. They cry out to God and get saved. Rarely, if ever, do people get saved because they love God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. We get saved in our own self-interest. We want eternal life. We don’t want the wrath to come as laid out in Revelation. We need help in our daily life, deliverance from addictions etc.

The first and great commandment is to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. When does that happen? It’s *after* we are saved! How do we get to the place where we love God and actually love our neighbor as ourselves? That takes transformation.

Reference to: Francis Chan, Balance Beam YouTube clip – In which he portrays Christians living the safest possible life, never stepping out for God and thinking they will be rewarded.

Shift Our Focus Off of the World and Onto “Forever Things”

For 11 years of teaching, I have exposed the corruption, darkness, and sin that is in the world, in current events with the light of God’s Word. It’s important that we do that but, in this series, we will take a shift to ourselves and how we can individually be blameless and holy. (Holy strikes fear in the hearts of many.) Look at Abraham he was told to be holy and blameless, it’s a theme through the whole bible. The epistles talk a lot about holiness. God’s Word says it best:

2 Peter 1:4

⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

There was corruption in the world back in the first century, there was corruption in Noah's time, there is corruption today, there is going to be corruption in the Book of Revelation times. There has always been and will always be corruption, we have nailed that down. We know there is corruption in the world through lust.

Instead, we will focus on how we can be lights in the world; how we can shine light into the dark culture.

1 John 2:16 and 17

¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

ALL that's in the world, guess what it is all passing away! Since we are concerned with doing the will of God we need to focus on "forever things" and get our focus off of the world and all that is ultimately passing away!

Seeking God Is Foundational

We need a real active hunger for God. We need to make what is important to Him, important to us. These will be very familiar verses. Each time we come to the Word it needs to be with an attitude of "God, teach me. God enlighten me. God allow me to see things on a deeper level, on a new level and He will do exactly that for us.

Here Christ is giving his "Sermon on the Mount" in the early part of his ministry...

Matthew 5:66

⁶⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Christ is saying right away, you will be blessed if you hunger and thirst for righteousness! What is righteousness? It is the very nature of God. God is always right, true, holy, just. It is the essence of being right. There is no unrighteousness, no ungodliness, no injustice in God. That is His nature. We are to hunger and thirst for righteousness. We are to imitate God as dear children. We are created in the image and likeness of God. If we do hunger and thirst for it, this verse says we will be satisfied.

There are two aspects of righteousness in the New Testament. We have our God-given righteousness because of what Christ accomplished. We are born again of God's spirit. We have the righteousness of Christ. But then there is the righteousness in living that out.

2 Timothy 3:16 and 17

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

We need doctrine, reproof, and correction in order to learn how to live rightly because we really want our lives to be pleasing to God. We need to ask, "How do I please God with my daily life?" How do I honor God, praise God, worship God? The Word does explain to us what to do and how to do it!

Think about hunger. When kids are hungry, they let you know. They cry out that they are hungry, they want to eat. We are to have that same type of active hunger for righteousness.

God tells us to be active, aggressive, intentional about seeking Him, His Word, and growing. The tendency of people today is to get saved and then do what they want the rest of their lives. To love, honor and please God is going to take a hunger and thirst for righteousness, thinking right, doing right, being right. It is also prevalent in the Old Testament. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah who was warning the children of Israel during Josiah's reign to get on the ball or they would be going into exile.

Zephaniah 2:1–3

¹ Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, ² before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff— before there comes upon you the burning anger of the LORD, before there comes upon you the day of the anger of the LORD. ³ **Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility;** perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.

It is always evident when someone is seeking something. Here we see that humility is a component of our quest. We have to be able to look at ourselves and recognize where we have been thinking, speaking, or living that does not agree with the Word and be humble enough to change.

Matthew 6:33

³³ But seek [zétéó] first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

This verse has been highjacked by some prosperity preachers who say if you seek first the kingdom of God all this “stuff” (worldly wealth) is going to be added to you. So, I will do my 10-minute devotional first thing in the morning and then go on about my day. That word “first” is not in order, it is in **priority**. Seek [zétéó] means to seek, to search for, to crave. It is present tense, active voice, imperative mood. It is a command that we should be continually doing. Our lives should be consumed with seeking God and his righteousness. As we do this all that we need in life will be given to us. In the context here, we don't need to be concerned about food, shelter, or clothing.

What Does It Mean to Seek God?

Psalm 36:7–10

⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. ¹⁰ Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart!

We see many elements here: Feasting on God, God is the fountain of life, in His light we see light (not in one's own light, the culture's light, or some philosopher's light). God will continue his steadfast love **to those who know Him**. Why doesn't it say to continue your steadfast love to everybody? Doesn't God love everybody? God does love everyone but to experience God's

love in a practical way in a relationship with Him it can only be done by those who know Him. To those who seek, who hunger and thirst after righteousness. And His righteousness to those with integrity, those with an upright heart. Not just putting in 10 minutes of devotional time in the morning, but truly seeking Him.

We want to look for examples in the Word of men and women who did seek God. If we look at Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul we get an idea of what was most important to them and then we can imitate their walks.

What is Love?

John 14:21–24 b

²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

If we want to know what love is, it's obedience! God and Christ are going to manifest themselves to us who demonstrate our love through obedience. To have that kind of depth of relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ is going to take hunger and thirst after truth and obedience to the truth we find. It is intentional. It takes energy. It is a free-will choice.

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Jesus brilliant answer to Judas' question...if ANYONE loves me—this opens it to anyone and everyone—he will keep my word, he will be obedient and my father will love him. This will be in an active, relational, daily way. And we, God and the Lord, will come to him and make our home with him! When you think of the importance of this in life...God and Christ making their home with ME...because I love them and want to keep the Word!

And here the shoe drops...

²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

So doesn't it behoove us to really know what it means to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength? Because if I do, I will receive this great benefit of God and Christ making their home with me. Ephesians says Christ will dwell in your heart by faith. Again, this takes an act of seeking.

Psalm 42:11

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

Examples of People Living Out a Life of Seeking God

Enoch does not get a lot of ink but in the long genealogy it says of him:

Genesis 5:24

²⁴ Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

Enoch **walked with God**. He had a relationship with God, so he gets mentioned by name. He lived @ 3000 B.C.

Abraham was called **the friend of God**. Wouldn't we all like to be a friend of God? To be in that kind of relationship, closeness, intimacy with him that He would say that of me? God is a gentleman. He does not violate free will. Adam and Eve took care of that, now we are descendents of Adam and Eve. We have this flesh and in it this propensity toward sin and disobedience. Yet, because of Christ, we can overcome it and walk by the new nature. We can have that kind of relationship if we will seek God.

Isaiah 41:8

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, **my friend**;

Moses knew God **face-to-face!**

We can shrink from this and say that was Abraham, that was Moses...I am just this little believer. This is available to anyone who will seek God with intensity. God is not a respecter of persons. It is up to each of us according to our willingness to SEEK Him.

Moses had done those powerful signs with Pharaoh. Moses had struck the rock and brought water to the people. He had turned bitter water to sweet water. They had bread from heaven, manna. All these signs, miracles, and wonders! God had called him to lead the children of Israel. What does Moses really want? God had said, I am not going with you. These people are stiff-necked.

Exodus 33:13–19

¹³ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.

Moses just wants to see God's ways in order to find favor in God's sight.

Consider too that this nation is your people." ¹⁴ And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.

"If you are not going with us, I am not in" says Moses.

¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" ¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

So, because of this relationship and because of Moses' heart, God agrees to Moses' plea and declares that he knows Moses BY NAME.

¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory."

Wow! Moses wants God to show him His magnificence, His nature, who He is, His Glory! That is what he really wanted to know.

¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.'

Think about the heart of Moses and think about our hearts. We too can have that kind of relationship.

David at this time was the King of Israel. What does he want?

Psalm 27:44

One thing have I asked of the LORD, **that will I seek after**: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

David's heart once again was to have that relationship.

Paul. What about Paul? Now it is about 62AD. Paul has had 30 years of living the gospel, has preached the Word over the then known world, had done signs, miracles, and wonders. All Asia Minor had heard the Word of the Lord Jesus as it says in Acts 19, he had raised someone from the dead...and what does Paul say is important to him?

Philippians 3:10

¹⁰ that I may know him [Christ] and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

That should be the heart of every one of us, to have that intimate relationship.

Peter. We will soon look at Peter too. Think about the contrast between Paul and Peter. Paul was most educated. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, zealous for the law, righteous before God, blameless according to the law he had said. Then you have Peter, a fisherman who had crumbled and betrayed Jesus three times. In John 21 we have seen Jesus grilling him—Peter, do you love me? Feed my lambs, feed my sheep. Then in 1 and 2 Peter, we see what Peter did for thirty years after the resurrection and how he internalized it, had that relationship and then could share to help others.

Summary

In this series on Discipleship and Growth. Transformation must be included since we are all descendants of Adam, born with a sin nature, and need to change.

Evangelists such as Franklin Graham are doing a great job in preaching Christ for salvation and getting people saved. But what is next? We need to learn the essentials regarding genuine discipleship as taught in the New Testament.

This series will be topical rather than Expository, covering much of what the New Testament says about how believers are to live and grow in the Church Age.

Foundational to success in transformation and growth is a true, active hunger for God and an intentional seeking of His will for our lives. The word "seek" in Matthew 6:33 is *zeteo* and it means to seek, to search for, to crave. It is present tense, active voice, imperative mood, which means it is a command that we should continually be doing. Discipleship is a daily endeavor! We cannot be passive about our Christian lives.

Our desire is to discover what the Word says about what is most important to God, how we are to please, honor, worship, praise, and glorify Him. We can be aided by the study of men and

women who have successfully walked with God and imitate them. Our study will require a look at the following topics: Christ-likeness, holiness, godliness, and righteousness.