
03 Genuine Discipleship: Introduction, Part 2A [1-13-23]

Our Goal is Genuine Discipleship

Genuine Discipleship, Growth to Maturity and Transformation is the title of this series. Our goal is Genuine Discipleship but in order to live as true disciples of Christ each of us needs to Grow to Maturity and to do that we need to be Transformed. We are born into this world as descendants of Adam. We are not born Christ-like or even wanting to be Christ-like.

Once we are born again, we begin to have the desire to become Christ-like. The Scriptures give us that sequence and teach us how to reach our goal. Years ago, I did a similar course titled Deliverance, Transformation, and Discipleship. At that time, I was doing prison ministry and many needed deliverance just to get to the point where they could read and understand God's Word and get on the path to transformation. Many in our world today need this type of deliverance of course.

Growth to Maturity

There are numerous ministries in the Church that God has given so we can all grow to maturity. Men and women with these callings are set in the church for specific purposes laid out here in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:11

¹¹And he [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, [truthing it] we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

In so many places in the New Testament we see scripture about growing to maturity, growing up into Christ. Here it says "to mature manhood." We don't want to remain little babes, little infants in Christ!

Here in Colossians, we see Paul's heart for the believers to see everyone mature in Christ.

Colossians 1:28

²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

We have apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers working within the body of Christ. Those five are referred to as the gift ministries. Everyone who is born again has some ministry, some function to be performing in the body of Christ as well. I mentioned Franklin and Will Graham a couple of times who are evangelizing. We all function in our ministries so that the individual and the church can grow to maturity.

In the fall we talked a lot about understanding the times, understanding ourselves and understanding God. God wants us to understand. We need to be aware of God's understanding.

Psalm 147:5-6

⁵ Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

Other translations say his understanding is Infinite, beyond comprehension. God is God. He knows EVERYTHING. God wants us to understand. He shares His thoughts, His understanding with us so that we can know, we can live and fulfill our destiny and our ministry and grow to maturity.

⁶ The Lord lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.

In order to get the understanding that God wants to give us [to achieve maturity] we need to be humble.

The Brevity of Life Should Inspire Commitment

Life really is short from God's perspective, and we need to redeem the time.

Psalm 39:4,5,6

⁴ "O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!

David, the psalmist is asking God to remind him. We all tend to think life is long; we have plenty of time. We want to live and enjoy life to the fullest. In Corinthians it says time is short, we need to internalize that and commit to making the best use of the time we have.

⁵ Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah

All mankind? Like a mere breath? What? There are almost 8 billion people on the earth right now and each life is like a breath to God!

⁶ Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather. ⁷ And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.

Our hope is in God. Our hope is in eternity with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what our focus should be. I know I am belaboring this point. We need to be aggressive and focused on what is important to God. As we adopt what is important to God and make it important to us then we can be really pleasing to him.

We've looked at this example from David in the Old Testament. Something similar is in James. James was the half-brother of Jesus. James during his life did not really believe Jesus was the Messiah but after the Resurrection he certainly did and wanted to make the best use of his time.

James 4:13,14,15

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow

will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Speaking to those interested in earthly wealth, going into a town to make a quick buck. None of us knows what tomorrow might bring. How politically incorrect to say that someone is but a mist! We are. From God's perspective we are a shadow. We are here and gone. We are but a handbreadth. Remember a day with the Lord is as a thousand years. A thousand years is as a day! God is infinite. His conception of time is very different from ours. He fills us in on that and allows us to see as he sees. James goes on to express what we should do instead:

¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

Whatever he wants us to do we will do! We have this limited time on earth so we can make the best use of the time, fulfill our destiny, which is to be Christ-like.

Parables Identify Seekers

In the last session I mentioned that in Mark 4 God had Christ speak in parables with the impact that some people were unable to understand, but for those who hung around and humbly asked for the meaning of the parable he elaborated. In John 14:23 Jesus said, "**if anyone.**" It IS open to anyone to demonstrate their love for God and for the Lord Jesus Christ by seeking, then keeping the Word that is sought out.

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. 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.

We have to be seekers.

Why Does Life Seem So Hard? – The Gospel Story in Brief

If it seems hard, it is not God who made it hard. It is hard because of what Adam and Eve did. They had everything in the garden, they did not believe God, they disobeyed Him, they rejected Him, they rebelled and got thrown out into the world. God could have just walked away, but instead out of love, compassion, and grace He put together a rescue plan starting in Genesis 3 prophesying that a Messiah would come. Now we have 6,000 years of human history. Because of the world, the flesh, and the devil God had to work with man's free will and wait for people who would actually believe.

- Noah believed and was saved when the evil world was flooded.
- Abraham believed God so God made the covenant with Him.

Man rejected God. God acknowledged man's free-will and acknowledged that the dominion that once belonged to Adam had been forfeited and picked up by the adversary. That is why scripture says that the devil is the god of this age, the prince of the power of the air.

I John 5:19

¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

But we have the privilege and the opportunity to seek God and to know Him. We have to be the seekers. Last session I alluded to a commentary on Mark 4:34 regarding the purpose of parables.

Mark 4:34 Commentary

In Mark 4:34, Mark tells us that Jesus explained these parables privately to his own disciples, thus, they needed further explanation, the parables were not clear teaching. In fact, just a few verses prior Jesus gave the reason for why he spoke in parables, “The sacred secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those who are outside, everything is in parables, with the result that although they see, they do not perceive, and although they hear, they do not understand; otherwise they would turn to God and be forgiven of their sin.” (Mark 4:11-12). Therefore, **the parables actually served to keep the truth hidden from people who were not seeking after God.**

If they really did understand they would turn to God, repent and be forgiven. So, the parables actually served the purpose of separating those who were hungry or not, those who were seeking or not. The truth would be kept hidden from people who were not seeking.

What Matters in Life, Really?

Courson’s Bible Author said, “The older I get, the more I understand that the only thing in life that matters is my relationship with God!

We grow to understand why the great men of the Bible all prayed and confessed, “God all I want to do is KNOW YOU!”

Paul writes this in the final chapter of Acts.

Acts 28:25

^{25b} “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ “Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never *understand*, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” ²⁷ For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and *understand* with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’

²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

See how many times that word “understand” shows up. God wants us to understand but we have to seek.

I am reminded of a couple who spent 9 years out on a sailboat sailing the world after retirement. They did not have any contact with the news, the negativity etc. and said as a result they were really peaceful.

If we will do as is described in Proverbs 2:1-11 we will be peaceful!

Proverbs 2:1-11

¹ My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, ² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to *understanding*; ³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for *understanding*, ⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it

as for hidden treasures, ⁵ then you will *understand* the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and *understanding*; ⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, ⁸ guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. ⁹ Then you will *understand* righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; ¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; ¹¹ discretion will watch over you, *understanding* will guard you,

Psalm 119:165

¹⁶⁵ Great peace have those who love your law [the Word]; nothing can make them stumble.

When we love God, love His Word and become immersed in it. We are going to have great peace.

It is hard and painful to say but 35% of the pastors surveyed by Barna said they do not read or study the scriptures other than to prepare their weekly sermon. **We can't maintain our holiness, our relationship with God if our head is not in the Word.**

Paul writing to Timothy...

I Timothy 4:11-16

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

We could spend a week here. Be an example in what you say, in what you do, in the love you demonstrate (true Godly agape love), in faith, in purity.

¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, **immerse yourself in them**, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

What an admonition for every Christian minister, teacher, leader today! Paul spoke this to Timothy. We mentioned in the last session that the word "pursue" is diókó. We all know what pursuit is. Students pursue their degree; people pursue a relationship with someone; a team is pursuing a championship. Then we see the word "pursue" in the Bible and it is "ho-hum." God wants us to actively pursue a relationship with Him, His truth.

Cultivating Hunger for the Word

diókó [pursue]

What is going to help us have the hunger for that pursuit is to taste the Word, absorb the Word, begin to apply it and live it. Then we learn by experience that this is really true. God is really faithful to His Word. The more we immerse ourselves the more we want to continue the pursuit.

We had read in Proverbs 2 about treasuring these words. Here are some related verses.

Matthew 13:44 and 45

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Once we see the greatness of God, His Word and relationship we are willing to sell out and commit fully to Him.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Christ is that one pearl of great value! We can abandon all else and pursue it. The reason we are spending so much time on this is that it is foundational to all we will be doing in the process of change and transformation. It takes that kind of commitment.

You may feel that this is just “too much.” This is not what is common in traditional denominational Christianity. However, this is God’s design for us in life. This is what He wants for all of us who believe. Please pass this understanding to your kids and grandkids so they know what God’s design for life really is.

Paul’s Understanding of Pursuit

Paul had pursued [*diókō*] and persecuted Christians, imprisoning them. He was consenting to the death of Stephen, the martyr who was stoned to death. He understood persecution because he had persecuted. Then he knew the pursuit of God where he instructed Timothy:

I Timothy 6:11

¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. **Pursue** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

1377 *diókō* – properly, *aggressively* chase, like a *hunter* pursuing a catch (prize). **1377** (*diókō*) is used *positively* (“earnestly pursue”) and *negatively* (“zealously persecute, hunt down”). In each case, **1377** (*diókō*) means *pursue with all haste* (“chasing” after), *earnestly* desiring to overtake (apprehend).

Paul knew both types of pursuit. He taught others to pursue God. Then he himself was persecuted: flogged, imprisoned [2 Corinthians 12] If anyone understood the meaning of the word “pursue, *diókō*,” it was Paul.

Taste The Word – Prove God at His Word

The more we get a taste of the Word, the more we will want to immerse ourselves in it. Consider the difference between eating ground chuck your whole life then someone introducing you to filet mignon. This is the difference between what most of us have experienced in our church or spiritual life and what is available to us from God. We read from Ezekiel 3 in our last session where God instructed Ezekiel to eat the Word, here are other related verses.

Psalm 34:8 and 10

⁸ Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! ⁹ Oh,

fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! ... ¹⁰The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Psalm 81:10

¹⁰I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

If we keep our mouth closed God can't fill it. If we keep our eyes, ears, minds receptive to the Word, God will fill us!

Psalm 119:129–131

¹²⁹Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. ¹³⁰The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. ¹³¹I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments.

What vivid pictures come to mind as we read these verses!

Psalm 119:103 and 104

¹⁰³How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ¹⁰⁴Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way.

Jeremiah 15:16

¹⁶Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart,

If the words were found, he was seeking them and pursuing them.

In the New Testament toward the end of Jesus' life [John 21] he confronted Peter asking him if he loved him and admonished him if he did to "feed my lambs, feed my sheep, take care of the flock." Peter later understood this and carried it out.

1 Peter 2:1–3

¹So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ²Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Consider how infants want that mother's milk. How the infant longs for it, desires it. Just like that we are to desire the pure spiritual milk of the word so that we can grow up into all that our salvation has gifted to us, the Christ within, the ability to grow up in Christ and be Christ-like.

Our Orientation to the Word is to be Humble and Tremble

In order to become Christ-like, we must have the correct orientation to the Word. Think of Isaiah! Isaiah was given revelation to record sixty-six chapters of instruction, of prophecy, of pure words from God and in the final chapter you see his orientation toward the Word and toward God.

Isaiah 66:1 and 2

¹Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; ...

In other words, "I am God and you are NOT!"

... what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? ^{2a} All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord.

The very God who created the heavens and the earth, whose throne is heaven, whose footstool is the earth, this magnificent God looks down on sinful man who is desperately in need of a rescuer and declares:

^{2b} But this is the one to whom I will look: **he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.**

Why would we tremble at his Word? Because God is God. His Word stands! By His Word He created the heavens and the earth. Think back to Exodus where the people so trembled at the Word that they wanted God to speak to Moses and then let Moses speak to them! It is God's Word! It is indestructible! It is going to come to pass. We can be absolutely certain that the things recorded in the Book of Revelation are going to come to pass.

It goes on...

Isaiah 66:3b and 4

^{3b} These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations; ⁴ I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

In light of all God has done for us, people still go their own way! God is clear about what he delights in and what he does not.

Isaiah 66:5

⁵ Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word:

We have the opportunity to love God, to tremble at his Word, to be in awe of Him.

Hebrews 4: 12 and 13

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

If the Word performs this division and discernment of our thoughts and intents, we need to allow the Word in and allow it to reveal to us the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Then we can humbly tremble at the Word and adjust and align our lives with it.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

All will one day need to give account. We know that we are righteous because we have accepted Christ and have been saved. But we will all appear to be rewarded **or not** according to what we have done with our time here on earth. We have the opportunity here and now to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

2 Corinthians 13:5

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

We go to the Word. We find out what God's thoughts and intentions are. Then we can match our own thoughts and intentions. If we discover we are not really living accordingly, we can decide to adjust now while we have the time, the resources with the Word, and the spirit of God in us. Adjust and change now before we must appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:9–12

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

What a privilege! What an opportunity to walk in a manner worthy of God!

1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men **but as what it really is, the word of God**, which is at work in you believers.

It really is the WORD OF GOD! It is at work in us when we read it, believe it, and apply it. It will work and we will see the fruit of it in our lives.

Let's delight ourselves in the Lord and He will give us the desires of our hearts. [He will place his desires for us in our hearts.]

2 Peter says God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. God has given us the doctrine, then he has given us examples of people who have lived it out. Then God puts his stamp of approval on them by the witness of their lives and by signs, miracles, and wonders as well.

God is clear about what pleases him.

Psalm 69:31

³¹ This will please the Lord more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.

God is clear about what does not please him.

Jeremiah 6:20

²⁰ What use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba, or sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to me.