

Discipleship Groups — Level II

WEEK 1 WHY THE DISCIPLINES?

Welcome to this second round of discipleship. Over the next weeks, we are going to be diving into the Spiritual Disciplines. If you want your spiritual life to go to the next level, then you need to engage in a life of discipleship, which is a life of discipline.

A friend of mine once told me, “Laziness is expensive. Either you have to hire someone to do it—and that is an expense—or you don’t do anything, and the problem grows and becomes more expensive!” Everything in life costs something. EVERYTHING.

Losing weight has the cost of diet and exercise. Making money has the cost of working a job or building a business. Getting an education costs money, time, and study. Raising godly children has the cost of consistency, discipline, and living out godly principles. In the same way, if you want a deeper relationship with God, it is going to cost you. Salvation is free, deep relationship is costly.

Jesus never called people to be “converts” or even “believers”—He called people to be His DISCIPLES. The word “disciple” comes from the Latin meaning “student.” Disciples do not just believe, they follow, and dedicate themselves to learning to be like the Master.

The word “disciple” also indicates one is “disciplined.” Discipline carries a dual function: first a disciple disciplined by the Lord, in that we are corrected by Him, because a good Father disciplines those He loves, and His discipline takes us into a deeper relationship with Him. And a disciple is also “disciplined” in that we are orderly and self-controlled living a life of discipline and not disorganized living. Anything in life that is disorganized will not produce good fruit.

For those who acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord, there is no such thing as belief in Jesus without following Him. It is the full expectation of Jesus that people who follow Him become like Him. In biblical Christianity, there is no hanging out on the fringes with a loose affiliation to religion, nor is there such a thing as merely a mental assent to the concept of Jesus, or simply acknowledging the Bible as God’s Word without taking it to heart. No. There are those who follow Jesus as a disciple, and those who do not. Cultural Christians, or convenient believers honor God in word only—but a disciple honors God with word, action, and heart.

In the Gospels, Jesus redefined for us who are truly God’s people. In Matthew 12:47-50, Jesus was preaching when someone came up to Him saying, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak to you.” Jesus asked, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Then he pointed to His disciples and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!”

In saying this, Jesus was indicating that those who truly belong to God have nothing to do with our personal family relationships, cultural contexts, bloodlines, traditions, affinities, desires, or religious affiliations. Those who truly belong to God are Jesus' disciples who obey God.

The Spiritual Disciplines are methods to discipline—or organize—our lives to follow Jesus and hear and obey God's Voice. They are habits we create in our lives that help us to focus on that which is good, right, pure, holy, honorable, and truthful. If you think about it, just about everything we do in life is done from habits we have created. The disciplines are not legalistic rituals to follow. They are not created to make life difficult—though it may seem so at first. They are created to help us become better followers and students of Jesus Christ. It is, as it were, a “curriculum for Christlikeness.”

Think of the Spiritual disciplines in terms of a flood versus a river. Both the flood and the river have the same amount of water, but a flood has nothing to direct the force of the water, and the water just runs everywhere and ruins everything. But imagine the flood waters with guides and banks. The water is focused and running in a singular direction—and nothing can stop the power of a river flowing at full force! The disciplines focus the force of our soul and spirit to connect them with God.

The disciplines take what God has given us and it makes us grow. Think of it this way: Discipline is what takes the natural talents of athletes and develops them to unleash their full potential. It would be ridiculous for a child to look at their baseball hero and think he can play just as well by simply buying the same jersey, glove, and bat. The equipment is not what makes the player great—it is the weight training, the thousands of hours of intentional, diligent practice in catching, throwing, hitting, and running.

To simply go to church but not engage with disciplined discipleship is to say, “I am now like Jesus because I heard about Him.” This is equally ridiculous as a kid thinking that wearing a jersey makes him a pro athlete or going to kindergarten makes us qualified for a calculus test. Becoming like Jesus requires us to do the things Jesus did in order to act like Him in every situation. Being like Jesus in any situation DOES NOT HAPPEN BECAUSE WE BELIEVE—it happens because we PRACTICE.

The point of the disciplines is not masochism, it is self-control so we can, as Ephesians 4:2 says, “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” we have in Jesus. The word “worthy” comes from the Greek word “axios” which means something that has weight or value to it. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to bring our lives before the Lord, He cleans us up and grows us to the place where our lives have actual weight in the Spirit—where they have spiritual value because they are filled with the “real” and weighty things of God. It is like Psalm chapter 1. The blessed people are the ones whose delight is in God's Word, and they meditate on it day and night. These people are compared to a “weighty” tree full of fruit. In contrast, those who do not delight in the Lord nor follow Him are compared to papery chaff, which has no weight and is easily blown away by the wind. As we walk worthy, the worth and value of our spiritual lives grow.

It needs to be pointed out here that this value I am talking about is not a reference for God's Love for us—we always have His love. I am talking about spiritual weight, value,

and authority we carry as one who is “the light of the world.” Everyone is equally loved, but not everyone carries equal authority. When we are undisciplined in His Word, or in other simple disciplines of knowing God, we are not allowing ourselves to be developed by the Holy Spirit into a person of fruitfulness or “weight.”

And what is the fruit God expects in the lives of His disciples? The fruit of His Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This gives spiritual depth and weight. Engaging in the Spiritual Disciplines is an act of discipline that is motivated by Faith and Love. Let's start with Faith:

FAITH:

The disciplines must be engaged in, just like everything else in the Christian life: by faith. For instance, if you were baptized without an inward conviction or faith in the Lord Jesus, then all you have is a wet sinner. If you take the elements of communion without belief, then all you did was have a snack. If you make the “salvation prayer” without faith, then nothing is activated.

The disciplines are the same. If you fast without faith, then all you do is lose a little weight. If you slavishly wake up early to pray and it is nothing more than a burden to you and if you're asking without belief, then you're doing little more than putting yourself through stringent exercises that ultimately accomplish nothing. But if the disciplines are done out of love for the Lord and in faith that He is renewing your mind, kindling a new fire of love, and changing your life, then the disciplines will have amazing effects in your life. IT MUST COME FROM THE SPIRIT AND NOT THE SOUL!!

LOVE:

The disciplines must also be done out of love for the Lord. This is probably the most important thing I will say: If engagement with the spiritual disciplines doesn't start with a heart overflowing with love for Jesus, then none of this is going to work. Just listen for a moment to what the Bible says about this very issue:

Ephesians 3:20 says that we need to know the love of Christ so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. In other words, obtaining everything that God has for us is found in knowing the love that God has.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says that there are many who will do supernatural works, and even to them God will say, “I never knew you.” Think of it...doing good works without a living and loving relationship with God means nothing to Him. Doing good things does not move God's heart as much as a heart that longs for Him! Each should be done without leaving the other undone!

In 1 Corinthians 13, love is the ultimate beginning and end of everything that we do, and in heaven's eyes, love determines the importance of what is actually done through our hands. This is why anything that is done out of pride or the ambition of recognition or position is so hateful to the Lord. It is using the Lord's name to further yourself, instead of loving Him with all your heart and doing things to move His heart.

Sometime ago I set aside some time to just be with the Lord. I began by simply telling him that I loved him, and then I heard His Spirit speak to me, "That is all I ever really want from you."

I took some time to sing to him a song that I wrote several weeks earlier that simply says, "I love you Lord with all my heart." He spoke to me again, saying, "Right now, this is my favorite song in the entire universe because it came from your heart."

As I continued to worship, I heard his spirit speak to me again, "the key to the supernatural is love. It is in a relationship of love where full access is granted, just like in a marriage." When love of God is the ultimate Motive for everything we do, God will withhold nothing from us, and everything that is done is done with absolute purity. It is not about the works, it has never been about the works. It is about the heart, and the works that please God flow out of a heart that first loves Him with all that it has. This cannot be faked or manipulated. Either you love Him with all your heart, soul, and strength, or you don't. Even if you can honestly say that you don't right now, but you want to, that is a good place to begin. Love can grow and be cultivated! It starts with just a spark of desire that can grow into a raging fire of love. Let these disciplines be more than rituals...let them be sparks that kindle a new fire of love and relationship!

REVELATION

The disciplines are not for the purpose of asceticism or bodily rigors that look really spiritual. Colossians 2:22-23 says, "Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires." The difference between asceticism and spiritual disciplines is that the disciplines engage the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit that produces the fruit of God's character in our lives that helps us overcome the desires of our sinful flesh.

The spiritual disciplines DO NOT LEAD US TO RELIGIOSITY; THEY LEAD US TO REVELATION! Ephesians 1:17-18 says, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." Did you get that? May God give you the Spirit of REVELATION about Jesus! The disciplines are not a religious exercise, they are for the purpose of taking you to a place where Jesus is fully revealed to you! As a matter of fact, our entire discipleship and walk with Jesus is not an act, it is not religion, it is not an art...it is REVELATION! This is what the spiritual disciplines are designed to help us tap into—knowing Jesus in the place where "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but the Father who is in heaven!"