



OUTREACH
COMMUNITY CHURCH

ON THE ROCK WE STAND

The Foundations of the Christian Faith

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Table of Contents

Foreword	03
Introduction	03
Section I – Foundations for Discipleship	05
Chapter 1 – It Starts and Ends with God	05
Chapter 2 – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit	11
Chapter 3 – Discipleship Defined	25
Section II – The Habits of a Disciple	31
Chapter 4 – The Habit of Meditating on God’s Word	31
Chapter 5 – The Habit of Prayer & Solitude	34
Chapter 6 - The Habit of Participating in Community	36
Chapter 7 – The Habit of Service	38
Chapter 8 – The Habit of Making Disciples	41

All scripture quotes are italicized for easy identification and are from the New International Version of the bible.

Foreword

This booklet is intended for those who are new to Christianity. The topics we examine in this booklet are exclusively based on Biblical truth. It is intended as an introductory summary of several truths of biblical scripture. My deepest desire is that this booklet will serve as a catalyst to create excitement to know and love our Jesus who first loved us. Your growth as a disciple of Jesus will grow like wildfire as you develop the daily habit of worshipping God by opening His Word and then acting on it.

Introduction

I'm guessing as an adult you may have said from time to time, "I wish someone would have told me about this when I was younger". And often we say that in response to lessons learned the hard way – through difficult personal experience. Yet, those hard-earned lessons have a greater impact on us than any other type of learning. We can listen to all types of teaching and read great books on many subjects. But until we walk through an actual experience ourselves, we really don't learn in a way that truly benefits us and others.

Another way to say it is that our real-life experiences move us from superficial knowledge (knowing "about" something) to experiential knowledge that truly transforms us. In our culture, we have a lot of superficial, head-knowledge about God. But have we truly experienced Him in a real, transformational way? Reading, studying and meditating on the bible every day is the beginning of knowing God. But just knowing the bible is not the ultimate goal of our faith. Scripture itself tells us that faith without works is dead.

¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:17

How do we take the truths of scripture and put them into action so that our heavenly Father is pleased with us?

My greatest passion is that you come to know Jesus in a personal way through

experiencing Him every day. Coming to a saving faith of Jesus is essential. But from that point, Jesus asks us to follow him every day and be His disciples through experiencing Him. But often we confuse being a disciple with just trying to meet the minimum daily requirements of following Jesus.

For example, my early years as a follower of Jesus were exactly like this: I would go to church on most Sundays. I would read my bible and pray occasionally. I would try to be a good husband and father. I would give a few bucks to my church when I had some extra funds. And, that about sums up my Christian life. Yes, I loved Jesus, I was forgiven of my sins and I was going to heaven. But, it is very clear in scripture what Jesus actually commands of his followers – to be active, productive, fruit-bearing disciples, growing toward Christlikeness.

Without any exaggeration whatsoever, please let me assure you this: there is no higher joy in life than knowing that you are living in the perfect will of Jesus every day as his disciple. When Jesus gives us a command, it is so that we will know the complete joy that only comes from being one with him:

¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. John 15:10-12

Section I – Foundations for Discipleship

Chapter 1 – It Starts and Ends with God

¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Revelation 22:13

As I sit at my computer trying to write this chapter, I almost laugh at the absurdity of trying to explain who God is. How does one dare to go about that? But, we all ask the question, if only to ourselves, is there a God? Where is He, because I don't see Him? What does He want with me, if anything?

I realize many of you may not have had exposure to teaching about who God really is. Others of you may be part of a church or organized religion, so you may have had some previous teaching. But, for all of us, let me start at the only place we can to explain God, his own word to us. The bible is God's authoritative and accurate revealing of Himself to us, his children.

If you have questions about the authenticity of the bible, there are many excellent resources to explore this topic further. Essentially, God directly inspired about forty different authors to write the sixty-six different books of the bible. Thousands of years old, it has never been proven wrong. It is God's personal word to you and me, it is without error and is the only authority for understanding God and his love for us.

God is Holy

To understand God, we should first understand his nature. In the Biblical book of Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 2, God says this about himself,

²Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I,

the Lord your God, am holy' Leviticus 19:2

To understand the incredibly unique nature of God, we first must understand his holiness. Webster's dictionary has an excellent definition of the word holy: "exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness."

Leviticus was one of the very first books written in the bible. As God revealed himself to the people of Israel thousands of years ago, he wanted them to understand his nature was one of perfect goodness and righteousness. Only God can make the claim to be perfect in goodness and righteousness. And since God is the only truly holy being, then he alone is worthy of our worship.

Another key aspect of His holiness is that he is "set apart" from anything ordinary, profane or sinful. God cannot be associated with anything of this nature. As we will cover in the next chapter, we cannot even come into his presence in our sinful state. How are we to bridge this infinite gap and spend eternity with God?

God is Absolute

The next quality to understand is God's "absoluteness". He literally holds all power, has all knowledge, is present everywhere and is supremely good, or holy. He has existed eternally and will always exist. He is not a created being. In addition, God defines the meaning of all truth. Because he is unchanging in nature, he is "absolute". He has no peer or equal and his wisdom cannot be challenged or questioned. He transcends time and space and has no limits. He creates, destroys, blesses and judges based only upon his perfect his will. Finally, He loves His children unconditionally.

In scripture, when Moses asked God his name so he could tell others, the book of Exodus chapter 3, verse 14 says,

¹⁴God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.' Exodus 3:14

The establishment of God as the "I AM" is his own message to us of his nature of absoluteness. This definition will be seen again as we explore the godliness of Jesus in future chapters.

Some additional scriptures to give testimony to these qualities are:

²⁷I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me? Jeremiah 32:27

¹³Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor? Isaiah 40:13

¹⁰But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. Jeremiah 10:10

God is Sovereign

There is no higher authority in the universe than God. He is in absolute control of all things. Being all powerful, his will reigns supreme in all things. Since he is all knowing, absolutely nothing escapes his attention.

God also sovereignly directs people, circumstances and events.

Daniel 2:21-22 says this about God,

²¹He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. ²²He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. Daniel 2:21-22

Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by your circumstances? Please remember that God is in total control of those circumstances. We worship a God that is righteous, loving and holy. He is not vindictive, but seeks our good always. God even tells us he will use difficult times to test and improve us to be more like Jesus. He promises this,

²⁸And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. Romans 8:28

Even though he is sovereign, he gives us the choice of whether we will submit to his leadership or not. How will you choose to cooperate with him?

God is Truth

Our God is absolute truth. It is impossible for him to be otherwise. In fact, God is the source of all truth. Our God, who is present everywhere and knows all things, has total understanding of what is real, what is right and what is true. Whatever He says is completely accurate. Whatever God says is absolutely right. Whatever He promises will always be fulfilled. God wants us to know the truth.

Jesus prayed for His disciples, asking God to:

¹⁷sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth. John 17:17

The Bible helps us know and understand the truth about Him, about ourselves and about life. God also manifested truth to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said,

⁶I am the way and the truth and the life John 14:6

While many people claim to know the truth, only Jesus could honestly claim to be the truth. God also guides us into truth through the working of His Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples,

¹⁶I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — ¹⁷the Spirit of truth John 14:16-17

God is the only source of truth in a society of relativism and falsehood. Do your decisions and lifestyle demonstrate that you are listening to Jesus? Or have you bought into the lies of popular culture? Are you consistently spending time discovering truth in God's Word? Truth will be found only by those who diligently seek it in the right places. Commit yourself daily to walk in the light of God's truth.

God is Faithful

Faithfulness is at the heart of all that God is and does. His truthfulness, holiness, love, righteousness and other attributes ensure His faithfulness. God is faithful to forgive you even when you are unfaithful. Because we are still in a body of flesh, we have a tendency to sin and, ultimately, to be unfaithful. How encouraging it is to remember God's promise:

¹³*if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*
2 Timothy 2:13

But you must be sincere in your repentance and not abuse God's grace. The Bible states,

⁹*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

God is faithful to purify you from unrighteousness. It is God's plan for you to become holy and advance His kingdom. And he is faithful to bring this to pass. Paul declared,

⁶*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6*

God is faithful to fulfill His promises. Hebrews 10:23 states:

²³*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*
Hebrews 10:23

God is ready and able to deliver all He has promised. God is faithful to help you in your need. He will never fail you! He is reliable. He is trustworthy. Your holy and loving God is faithful!

God is Love

While I'm in complete awe of the nature of God described, the most reassuring quality of God for me is his sacrificial love for all of us. 1 John 4:7-8 says,

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:7-8

God's love is unconditional for all mankind. Some will choose to accept his greatest gift of love, salvation from sin, and some will not. Those that accept his salvation through Jesus come to love him in return. This is freely given because he loved us first.

³⁷Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. Matthew 22:37-38

On our own, we are incapable of loving as we should, but God gives us an unending supply of His divine love. It is for us to enjoy and to share with others. When believers begin to love God, love their neighbors as themselves and love their enemies, society will change for the better. Then the world will marvel when they see and experience the transforming power of God's love

If we take all the powerful attributes of God and then try to comprehend the fact that He is the very definition of love, it's completely overwhelming to think that we, his children are loved unconditionally. Romans 5:8 says,

⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Chapter 2 – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

In the bible, we see that God reveals Himself in three ways, or “Persons” to use a common term. You may also hear people refer to these three Persons as the Trinity. These Persons are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. While God is spirit, he has chosen to reveal and relate to us through three distinct Persons. This was his perfect choice and in His wisdom, he helps us understand who he in his majesty and glory.

God the Father

We primarily see God reveal himself throughout the Old Testament of the bible as God the Father. Ephesians 4:6 says,

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4-6

This magnificent verse tells us that God is one God as first revealed in the Father. Matthew 23:9 tells us,

⁹And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Matthew 23:9

God, as our creator, takes the rightful place as our spiritual parent when we commit our hearts to him. To me, this brings peace and comfort to my soul, knowing that my Father is eternal, loving and is always for me, not against me.

Of course, the Old Testament, or Old Covenant, summarizes the relationship between God and man prior to God revealing himself as God the Son. Thus the New Testament now represents God’s new promises revealed to us through Jesus, God the Son.

God the Son

In the New Testament God reveals himself through the Person of Jesus, the Christ. The title Christ means “anointed”. It is also equivalent to “messiah”.

When we speak of God revealing himself to mankind, I must start with this magnificent scripture from the book of John:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:1-5

It’s fascinating that Jesus would be described as the Word. That’s because He is the highest expression of God and is God. Interestingly, Jesus existed as God before taking on flesh as a man. Being part of the Trinity, He was the Creator of all known things. But being described as the light of all mankind tells us about his purpose as the Savior of mankind.

The New Testament, originally written in Greek, uses the word “logos”, which we translate as “Word” in English. Logos can be understood in Greek to refer to reason or thought. Thus, applying this to Jesus, the author John is saying that Jesus is the “divine reason” or “mind of God” expressed in the Person of Jesus. He is the ultimate and highest expression of God and is God.

Why a Savior?

Why is mankind in need of a Savior (Messiah)? It starts with God being Holy and sinless. In contrast, man’s basic nature is sinful. Romans 3:23 says,

³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

1 John 1:8-10 says,

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

1 John 1:8-10

Mankind, being unclean and forever corrupted by sin, cannot enter the presence of the Holy God. In order to have an eternal relationship with God, our sins must be forgiven. Under the Old Covenant, sins were forgiven by the shedding of the blood of animals annually in God's Temple.

The Old Covenant

Why was blood sacrifice necessary? Because the result of sin is death:

²³For the wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23

Sin causes the eternal death of the sinner, that is, eternal separation from God. The blood sacrifice was a vivid reminder of the deadly serious nature of sin for all people.

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned— Romans 5:12

Yes, this is a very sobering thought, but it's crucial that we understand our sin nature and most importantly, that we agree with God in his assessment of us.

Under the old blood sacrifice, it served as a "covering" or forgiveness for the Jewish people that accepted its meaning. But that old sacrificial system was only temporary.

¹The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ²Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:1-4

The New Covenant

But the old sacrificial and forgiveness system were just a foreshadowing of God's ultimate plan. In his incredible love for all mankind, He himself would serve as the final blood sacrifice for all sins. This final sacrifice was accomplished by the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God, Jesus.

⁸First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. ⁹Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:8-10

Our Transformation from Sinner to Holy

Thus, Jesus becomes the Messiah, because he willingly offered Himself for the sins of man. But, not only that, once he offered himself as the final sacrifice, he showed his power as Lord by overcoming death and rising to eternal life.

²⁵He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:25

But, also notice in Hebrews 10:10 above that "we have been made holy through the sacrifice". Consider what God is saying here: our cleansing is so complete, that in HIS eyes we are now holy. 2 Corinthians 5:17 dramatically talks about our new heavenly status like this:

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17

Those whose heart has been given to Jesus are completely forgiven of all sins. Regardless of their severity, regardless of our previous life, know this: God is big enough to forgive every sin and welcome you into his family for all eternity. This is the Gospel of Jesus – THE good news that mankind must hear and come to know.

Salvation is a Gift – It Cannot be Earned

Our salvation cannot be earned. Please hear this: you cannot be a “good person” and hope that will be enough to enter into heaven. This is the number one belief of most non-Christians. But God says no one is good enough to enter heaven. We are doomed to an eternity in hell, separated from God if we die without Jesus. It may seem like a harsh message to some, but I appreciated believers telling me the truth about Jesus before I was a Christian. Jesus in his love offers salvation only as a gift. It’s up to us to receive it and place our complete faith and trust in Him. Ephesians 2:1-9 says:

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:1-9

The Only Path to Heaven

One more word about this salvation. It's offered only by Jesus and no other religion, belief system or faith is acceptable to God. Yes, there's only one path to heaven, but it IS available to all who confess Jesus as Lord regardless of race, color, tribe or creed.

¹¹Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:11-12

Repent, Be Baptized, Become Disciples

¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:10-13

As we've already seen, all mankind are sinners in need of a way to heaven. Only Jesus provides the forgiveness that we need. Once we wholeheartedly agree with God that we are sinners, and ask Jesus for His forgiveness, we receive that gift and eternal life, then we are required to do three things by Jesus. First, we must repent of our former way of life.

³⁸Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Acts 2:38

The word repent simply means "to change the mind". Repentance is a change in the way we think that leads to change in the way we live. When you really change your mind about something, it's going to change the way you think about it, talk about it, feel about it, and act about it. True repentance is more than just a mental game. Repentance is a decisive change in direction. It's a change of mind that leads to a

change of values that leads to a change in the way you live.

In the book of Romans, the writer, the Apostle Paul said we must put our sinful ways to death permanently.

¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Romans 6:11-12

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can now resist and overcome all temptation to sin that comes our way, we are no longer slaves to its evil power.

Next, we must be baptized. This is a public testimony and symbolic of our transformed life and, it is commanded by Jesus for all new believers. Baptism is an incredible encouragement to those that see it. And, it marks a critical turning point in the life of the new believer.

Finally, we are now to follow Jesus as the Lord of our lives by becoming his fruit-bearing disciples.

The Blessings of Our Relationship with Jesus

Placing our faith in trust in Jesus transforms us into a new creature as mentioned above in 2 Corinthians 5:17. We should thank God every day for what He has freely given us that truly place our faith in Him. The blessings of loving Jesus as Lord are incalculable. In order to highlight some of them, please allow me to list a few.

Forgiveness: ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. Ephesians 1:7

Eternal Life: ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. John 3:36

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit: ³⁸Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

Transformation: ²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22-24

Family Member: ¹¹Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. Hebrews 2:11

Power over Sin and Temptation: ¹³No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Fruit of the Holy Spirit: ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-25

Authority to Represent Him: ²⁰We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

Focus on The Eternal: ¹⁹Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. Matthew 6:19-20

¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17

A Life Mission: ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus Must Become Our Lord. We Must Become His Disciples.

A well-known German pastor and author, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, lived during the Nazi regime in Germany during World War II. He stood up against their evil plans and worked within Germany for their defeat. Ultimately, he would be executed for his beliefs. Although he had the chance to escape Germany, he refused. He believed his duty and obligation to his faith in Jesus required him to stay and fight from within.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer says this about the grace, or the undeserved favor, that Jesus has shown us by providing the forgiveness of sins as a gift:

“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

Bonhoeffer is addressing what could be the greatest challenge today in the church of Jesus Christ. That is, many have believed that Jesus provides forgiveness from sin and they've placed their faith in Him, but little evidence is seen of the transformed life. Their committed, fruitful discipleship is lacking.

I'm really passionate about this dilemma because this "cheap grace" concept describes my life as a Christian for many years. I was saved as a teenager and had a genuine love for Jesus. But I became what I affectionately call a "pew sitting Christian". I was in church most Sunday's, I occasionally read my bible, but really there was little else going on in my spiritual life. I say "cheap grace" because I did not exercise the blessings given to me as a follower of Jesus. A great price had been paid for my eternal freedom, but I did not appreciate its value.

If I ask why that occurred, the reasons are many. So, I don't want to place blame or waste time on the past. But I want to help as many new believers as possible truly experience Jesus in a genuine relationship, not just have an intellectual knowledge about Him, which leads to a weak spiritual condition.

After a spiritual awakening in mid-life, Jesus forced me into the realization of who I really was in Him. In other words, my head knowledge became real-world spiritual experiences. My relationship with Jesus became much more than just a Sunday morning service, it became my primary focus and my purpose. That does not mean I took a role as a full-time minister in a church, but that I became committed in my heart to becoming a real disciple.

Now, I can really say I'm passionate about serving Jesus, because it is not about giving something up, but about seeing Him work in amazing ways when I say yes to where He leads me. Truly, the Son of God, the Almighty, wants to work through you to do things you never imagined possible.

In contrast to cheap grace, Bonhoeffer teaches we have costly grace:

"Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him."

God the Holy Spirit

³⁸Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:38-39

The third Person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is probably the least taught and least understood representation of God. But, God is explicit, as seen in the verse from Acts above and many others, that all believers receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when they confess Jesus as Lord.

It is often said that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a fact, not a feeling. I think that's generally true, but personally, I remember my life before becoming a Christian and after. My deep phobias about death disappeared once I trusted Jesus. There's no question that by being filled with the Holy Spirit, my fears were eliminated. While our fears are not tangible, they certainly felt very real to me. And, I credit the continual indwelling of the Spirit in ridding me of those fears.

The bible tells us much about the nature and purpose of the Holy Spirit. I think it would be helpful to start there to help us understand why we have received the Spirit of Jesus.

Conviction About Sin

⁷But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because people do not believe in me. ¹⁰About righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. John 16:7-11

Jesus says the Holy Spirit is active in proving the world to be in the wrong about sin. The world most certainly needs conviction about sin and it is the Holy Spirit that causes this conviction. As we seek to bring others into the faith, we should always be assured that God is working in their lives to bring them to a saving knowledge about Him. And, he has asked us to participate in the salvation process by being his representative, or ambassador. So, working jointly with the Holy Spirit we are to go and make disciples.

Our Counselor

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17

The word “advocate” literally means, “one who comes along side us”. The sense of the word is someone who walks alongside us as we go through life. Jesus said he would be with us until the very end of the age and he literally is, in the person of the Holy Spirit. So, the indwelling of the Spirit is the very real presence of Jesus in our spirit. It’s amazing that God would be so close, and will help guide us through every situation.

Our Comforter

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

When we are at our weakest, the Spirit literally steps in and helps us pray and provides peace that only He can give. It’s incredible how close God is at all times and it’s a wonderful comfort that He sees us through the toughest of times.

Our Assurance

¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8:16-17

The Holy Spirit is always there to remind us whose we are. We are not our own, but we are God's special possession, his own children. There is no higher privilege in life.

Our Testimony

²⁶When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. John 15:26-27

The Spirit himself will give all believers the power to testify as to the truth of Jesus. He will convict others of sin, and he gives us the power to share his truth with them.

Our Truth

¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you." John 16:13-15

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth several times. The powerful idea here is that the Holy Spirit will be God's witness of truth and falsehood in our lives. By seeking and listening to the very Spirit in us, God will guide our path into all truth for living.

Walking by the Spirit

¹⁶So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Galatians 5:16-18

In our old nature, before placing our faith in Jesus, we committed “acts of the flesh”. We lived in sinful ways. But now that we are transformed and filled with the Holy Spirit, we are no longer slaves to those ways. We should thank God every day that He has empowered and called us to His standard of holiness.

The Fruit of the Spirit

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-25

Now by walking in the Spirit, we are at peace with Jesus. This is because we walk with Him in such a way that our lives are Spirit led, not fleshly led. And, the fruit is noticeable to everyone and beneficial to them also. Consider the value of the riches of God’s grace when you truly experience His love, joy, peace and all the rest. By walking in the Spirit we are at one with our Creator. Considering the damning effects of the flesh and its passions, who would desire such a bleak existence? Thank God we have been rescued from such futility!

Chapter 3 – Discipleship Defined

What Can God Do With Me?

If you're wondering as a newer Christian about this whole discipleship thing, so was I when I was young in the faith. The thoughts running through my head were endless. I believed I had nothing to offer, I wasn't trained, I wasn't confident and I had no clue what all this spiritual stuff meant. If that's you, you're in the right place!

The first comment I would have to my younger self in those early days of my faith would be this: remember that discipleship is a relationship with our Lord Jesus, not a set of rules, or a program to follow, or anything else for that matter. To be a Christian is to be a committed disciple in a personal relationship with our Lord.

Having a relationship with Him first requires we know Him as the Lord of our lives. Knowing the depth of His love and His great sacrifice for us, He is the only one worthy of our worship. Our relationship with Him is now eternal, unbreakable and filled with joy. In fact, He alone is our source of joy. Think of it: the Creator has adopted you and me into this family and we are His sons and daughters in the fullest sense of the word.

Jesus' Purpose

¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:17

Jesus did not come to earth to make it a better place to live. He came to save the lost so that they would be with Him in his eternal kingdom. Jesus lived, died and was resurrected for this purpose alone. He gave everything He had so that we would know Him eternally. Now that he has ascended into heaven, guess whose responsibility it is to carry out the work of building the eternal kingdom? Here's what Jesus says:

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

His Purpose Is Our Ministry

You and I, his disciples, have been assigned the holy task of the "ministry of reconciliation". Notice it has been "committed to us." Without exaggeration, the keys to eternal life have been placed in our hands. We have the knowledge of the cure for sin! Just as we would jump into a lake to save a drowning person, we must jump into the ministry of reconciliation to save the lost who are doomed to hell.

The word "reconcile" means to restore a relationship to its right place. Jesus is the Person through whom we have a restored relationship with God, because of his sacrifice on the cross. Prior to that reconciliation, we all were outside of His love and His Kingdom. Now, we are family members with full access to our King.

As a family member, he now wants us to share in the joy of the reconciliation process with others. The Holy Spirit is at work in the lost, convicting them of sin. We just need to share the good news that God and man are now reconciled. Then, we are to help them mature as disciples. Jesus would call this process "making disciples."

What is Discipleship?

Discipleship means much more than just the transfer of information from teacher to student, it actually refers to imitating Jesus' life, adopting his values, and reproducing his teachings. Therefore, Christian discipleship requires a daily relationship with the master Teacher, following Him, and adhering to His way of life.

Jesus' expectation for his followers was clear: to become more and more like

Himself.

⁴⁰The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. Luke 6:40

Being like our Teacher is a lifelong pursuit. We never stop growing and striving to be like Jesus. And, in my experience, with our commitment and growth come new and exciting experiences that only increase our joy and deepen our relationship with Him.

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Bonhoeffer would say this about discipleship:

“Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. Only those who obey can believe, and only those who believe can obey. The life of discipleship is not the hero-worship we would pay to a good master, but obedience to the Son of God.”

Our Commitment

In the heart of a disciple there must be a clear, irreversible decision to follow Him for life.

²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Matthew 16:24

Jesus’ message for his disciples is made starkly clear in this verse: we must abandon “self” as our god and follow Him with our entire being. There is no middle ground. Our love for the things of this world must come to an end and our commitment to Him must shine through in all we do.

My personal testimony is that in this commitment you will find no greater joy or higher calling. The false appearance of success, money, pleasure, security, respect and all types of worldly pursuits is starkly opposite the life of a committed disciple of Jesus. But the hollow and temporary nature of those worldly things can never, ever equal the peace that comes with following the will of God.

¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; ¹⁶for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever. 1 John 2:15-17

Characteristics of a Disciple

The bible tells us much about the nature of a disciple who is “mature”. Here’s my encouragement to you: if you find you’re possibly lacking in one of these areas, you now know where to focus. Spend time in the Word and prayer asking Jesus to show you why you might be lacking.

Ask for wise counsel from other mature disciples who you can trust intimately. But please don’t ignore the obvious signs of immaturity when you see them. Jesus is expecting us to invest the time and effort it takes to become His fruitful disciples.

Here are some of the main characteristics of a mature disciple as described in scripture:

Loving: ³⁴A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34-35

Joyful and Obedient: ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. John 15:10-11

Fruitful: ⁵*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. John 15:5-8*

Godly: ⁸*For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:8*

Hopeful: ³*Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5*

Image of Jesus: ²⁸*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Romans 8:28-30*

To me, these characteristics describe the blessed life. The mature, faithful disciple is essentially living in the will of Jesus and is showing him to the world.

My Burden is Light

Finally, I want to emphasize that the Holy Spirit of Jesus will help us in every respect to become fruitful disciples. He has promised to be with us every moment. He has promised to give us the words to speak when we can't find them. He has promised His peace for our hearts, not the peace of the world. And, he has promised that none of this is too hard for him or us. I love this verse from Matthew 11:29-30.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:29-30

Our being “yoked” or joined with Jesus as His disciple is a blessed, holy calling for each of us. Jesus wants to manifest his very presence in us. Jesus literally wants to work the works of the Kingdom through each of us. And, we will experience his gentleness and peace in the process.

Section II – The Habits of a Disciple

Chapter 4 – The Habit of Meditating on God’s Word

“Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4

Jesus spoke those words when he was just beginning his ministry as an adult. He had been led into the desert by the Holy Spirit for forty days of testing. There, Satan himself tempted Jesus three times to give up his ministry purpose. How did Jesus defeat the devil every time? Not just by quoting scripture or having knowledge of the scripture, but by believing in the power of the Word of God.

The Word is Alive

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

“So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11

While in our humanity, we may think of the bible as possibly just wise words on a page, God tells us something completely different. Look at the words used in those two verses above to describe the spiritual activity of God: alive, active, sharper, penetrate, dividing, judge, goes out, accomplish, desire, achieve, purpose and sent. God is always moving toward his purposes! God has and will continually accomplish his purposes throughout history. By believing in and acting on His Words, His will is carried out by His disciples.

In other words, the bible, while full of positive and hopeful thoughts, is actually much more than a book to make us feel good. It is God’s active plan for calling all

mankind to Himself, so that His church is built for all eternity. Sadly, we know that some will reject these very words of God. But those that receive His words and act on them, will inherit eternal life. And, while still in this life, we will receive His power so that we will bear much fruit as His disciples.

Scripture is Flawless

⁵Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. ⁶Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar. Proverbs 30:5-6

Just to reiterate the perfect nature of God and His Word, Proverbs tells us that the bible is flawless. Like a perfect diamond sparkling under the light, we can place our full trust and hope in his Word alone.

Our Daily Bread is Scripture

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

We must remember that God inspired men to write the scriptures, but they are not human in origin. They are directly from Heaven. And this instruction from Heaven is necessary for our training in righteousness. In other words, if we are to be his disciples, we will only learn how to do that from the bible alone. As Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 above, it must become more important than our daily meals. Our spiritual condition must receive more care and attention than our physical condition.

Our daily habit of studying, memorizing, and meditating upon scripture will bring us into the heavenly realm like nothing else. It is required for spiritual living and fruitful discipleship.

Finally, I wanted to include this wonderful and inspiring description of the Word of God written by King David in Psalm 19:

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous. ¹⁰They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. ¹¹By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Psalm 19:7-11

Chapter 5 – The Habit of Prayer & Solitude

³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35

¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:16

When talking about prayer, I think it's good to look at Jesus' own habits regarding prayer. The bible has multiple examples of Jesus praying to the Father, while he was here on earth. And we also see that He prayed consistently throughout His ministry.

The ability of prayer to directly connect us with Jesus is mentioned frequently in scripture. God's people can take any and all subjects to Him. My goal in this chapter is only to present the rationale for you as a disciple to develop the habit of deep, prayerful communication with Jesus. He invites and covets your prayers.

Consistent Prayer

²Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Colossians 4:2

As a suggestion for devotion to prayer, I personally set aside time each morning, right after waking up and each evening, just before bed, to pray. This has proven a great way to focus my thoughts in the morning on thankfulness, being aware of His Word to me, and petitions for all the needs of myself, my family and my church family. In the evening, I find myself reflecting on and praising Him for all that he has done and for His calming presence to clear my mind so I can sleep soundly. Of course, I say many quick prayers throughout the day as needed.

¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. James 5:16

Prayer is required as we humble ourselves before Jesus and seek His forgiveness. Any repentant heart poured out before Him will result in a clean heart free of guilt.

Notice in the verse that James refers to the prayers of righteous people as effective. The righteous are submitted to God and His will, not their own. By being aligned with His will, our prayers become powerful and effective.

Ask, Seek, Knock

⁷Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Matthew 7:7-11

In what is called The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us much instruction as His disciples. This key passage tells us that we are to continually be before Him in everything: asking, seeking, and knocking. It should be a tremendous encouragement that He wants to bless us with His “good gifts.” Again, we should be in continuous prayer seeking His will, confessing our dependency on Him alone and offering our joyful praise for His sacrifice.

Chapter 6 - The Habit of Participating in Community

³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Acts 4:32-35

This passage was written at the time immediately after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus into heaven. The newly formed church in Jerusalem was on fire for Jesus! They had witnessed the miraculous events of that day and now they were forming a special community. The first verse is of particular importance: "all the believers were one in heart and mind". The Lord Himself had been in their presence and He had changed them forever. Now, they were joined eternally as His family to give testimony to the resurrection.

Are we any different? Of course not. We have the same resurrection and the same Holy Spirit to which we give testimony. That common purpose formed an unbreakable bond and created a new community of disciples like the world had never seen. We can and should be that community of one heart and mind to our lost world today. Supporting each other, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, and continually giving praise and testimony to His power.

As You See the Day Approaching

²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

The “Day” mentioned above, is what the bible frequently refers to as “The Day of the Lord”. This is a very important biblical concept generally referring to the second coming of Jesus to eliminate all evil from the earth and usher in his kingdom of righteousness for eternity. I just don’t have the time here to devote to this very exciting and complex topic. But notice what the verse says, believers should be knowledgeable of and expecting the final events in world history leading to the return of Christ. In fact, we will be able to see it approaching!

What’s our response to these events? Be in a community (church) that supports, encourages, and trains one another so that we glorify Him. We should respect God’s desire to keep the Sabbath day as Holy and set it apart for Him.

⁸Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Exodus 20:8

This includes worshipping together as a family of believers. In addition, small home-based discipleship groups and churches were and are still very common. All these frequent acts of gathering for fellowship, edification, worship and training are going to be even more essential as the Day approaches.

I Will Build My Church

¹⁵“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Matthew 16:15-18

Jesus is calling us from being lost, into disciples that form an eternal community called his church of which all disciples are members. This is a holy and sacred calling, because it originates from the Holy God. On earth, this manifests itself in the local body of Christ, in which we are expected to be active and fruitful participants and even spiritual leaders. Active participation in the church community is not option for the true disciple of Jesus.

Chapter 7 – The Habit of Service

Serving the Least of These

³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:34-40

Jesus shows his heart for the disadvantaged in this great passage. Notice Jesus equates Himself with the least of these brothers and sisters. That's how closely He feels to those in real need. It's interesting that the righteous are not aware of their actions. They are matter of fact about meeting needs to the point of not considering them unusual actions.

Our acts of righteousness can take many forms. Jesus especially wants us to consider others in deep need as areas of service. And, while performing those acts of service, we give testimony to Jesus and have the obligation to share the Gospel with all.

Will You Wash Feet?

³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water

into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:3-5

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 13:12-17

At His very last meal on earth, before his crucifixion, Jesus performs a task so below his stature, it could not be believed. A Rabbi would never do this task, nor would any Jewish man for that matter. Washing feet was a task for servants only. But Jesus is teaching us all something extremely important as we learn to serve. We might end up serving others in an unusual or uncomfortable way. We might be asked to leave our comfort zone or area of expertise.

I've heard some Christians say, "oh, that's not my spiritual gift" as a way to avoid areas of service. How totally sad that we miss the opportunity to humble ourselves, as our Teacher did, and help someone else. Certainly, spiritual gifts are real and valuable. But God may place an opportunity in front of you that you never considered. Be open to His leading to serve, because Jesus says you'll be blessed if you do.

As a personal example, I've had the opportunity to work in prison ministry for many years. Never in a million years did I think that would be a place I could serve. But, through a friend who insisted I go with him (he dragged me kicking and screaming), I went on my first prison visit. Of course, Jesus was in the midst of that effort and miracles of salvation occurred. I'd never seen anything like it. I was hooked.

Now, after years of service in prisons, I really understand what Jesus is saying in Matthew 25. The words jump off the page! This is not just a bible story, to me it's an experience of participating in the work of Jesus. The fruit of that ministry has been

incredible in seeing souls saved, families restored, and the vast majority of those men don't return to prison. (Normally, 55-60% of all offenders will be reincarcerated again. In the ministry I'm referring to, less than 10% of the participants in that discipleship program will return to prison.)

So, my appeal to you as my brothers and sisters in Christ is this: please, please find a ministry in which you can serve consistently. Find people with which to build relationships and be Jesus to them. You can do a lot of "good things" that are not people focused which is fine on an occasional basis, but I highly recommend that the principal focus of your service be on working with and serving other people. Your faith will absolutely come alive as you see Jesus working in them. Please don't miss out on the blessings Jesus promises as you see the Holy Spirit transform others.

Chapter 8 – The Habit of Making Disciples

In the previous four chapters, we have talked about several foundational habits that are critical for disciples: bible study, active prayer, being in a church community and acts of service. I use the word foundational for a reason, because the habit of making disciples will be based on your consistent investment in those four habits.

They are the required building blocks that will propel you to faith, knowledge and genuine excitement to participate with Jesus in the building of his church. I want to focus this chapter on some of Jesus' final words to his disciples before leaving earth and ascending to heaven:

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

In the Matthew passage, most call this verse "The Great Commission". Jesus is authorized, as Lord of all, to empower our success in making disciples. He will send the Holy Spirit to prepare us and convict others of their sins. Notice he didn't say "plant churches", or "offer great programs", or "build nice facilities". His final command is this: seek the lost, share the Gospel, and teach them how to be fruitful disciples. Disciples will form churches, but discipleship comes first.

Step One: Go and Make Disciples

The reach of Jesus' command is literally worldwide. Family, friends, neighbors, enemies, foreigners and strangers all need the Gospel. Interestingly, the most important part of being a disciple is to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

It may not seem easy at first, but when you're involved in the process, you'll share in the joy of seeing others come to know Him. Your faith will be powerfully renewed every time in remarkable ways.

Step Two: Baptize Them

Baptism is seen throughout the New Testament as a requirement for each believer. It's symbolism and public testimony are powerful. For each of us, it marks a turning point in our lives, a marker if you will. The old ways are left behind, a new, beautiful life awaits. It is a command of Jesus and it is a powerful event that must be completed.

Step Three: Teach Them

Once we have confessed Jesus as Lord and been baptized, then we are to model our lives after our Master. This is discipleship in its fullest sense. I'll say it again for clarity, the goal of discipleship is not to learn "about" Jesus, the goal is to be transformed into His image as fruit-bearing followers.

Engage in our God-given mission – your small group is not the end goal of your Christian growth. It's the launching pad! Without a mission, we will not have transformation. Mission gives my discipleship a purpose: to find the lost and help them become fruitful disciples also.

Now, when studying the Word and praying, real purpose is found because there is an objective. Going to Sunday worship is a joy because it's a celebration of what God is doing on a regular basis. Being in community with other believers is exciting, because we know the Holy Spirit is at work transforming others daily.

Ask God to show you how to get started in finding your mission and He will lead you. Your small group will absolutely help you do this.