



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

**Year Four
First Quarter – Part II
Relationships**

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First Quarter – Christ and Culture: Issues in the Black Church

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Lesson Five: What About Grandparents?

Primary Verses: “You shall rise up before the gray-headed and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.” Leviticus 19:32 (NASB)

Teaching Text: Genesis 48

Supporting Texts: Proverbs Titus 2:2-5

We have all heard the saying, “God has no grandchildren.” Of course, this means that the mere fact that one’s parents are believers in Christ does not at all guarantee or even imply instant salvation for the children. No one is in right standing with God *solely* based on the faith of their parents, but each person must come to faith in Christ on their own. Yet, godly parenting may impact one’s descendants. In this lesson, we see a wonderful example of grand-parenting from a man who wasn’t exactly a stellar parent. We can see at least three ways...

Grandparents should be mature in the faith. After 17 years at his new Egyptian address, Jacob of Canaan, who lived in Paddan-aram, is now ending his sojourn on earth. In the presence of his son, Joseph, and grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, he recounts the various ways and episodes in which God revealed Himself as faithful to His word (48:3-4, 11, 15-16).

Grandparents should guard a godly legacy with wisdom. We can safely presume that after 147 years, Jacob was well-aware of his own flaws. He certainly lived long enough to see how some of his errors and sins bore bitter fruit! He also knew the strengths and faults of his own sons (as he will outline in chapter 49). Knowing his departure from the scene was soon to come, he made his best attempts to protect the unity of his family. It was very possible that, in generations to come, his Egyptian grandchildren might have been excluded from any claim in the Land of Promise. But, by elevating Ephraim and Manasseh to the rank of heirs, he not only alleviated that fear but also made a great statement of faith, trusting that God would one day lead his descendants out of Egypt into their own country (also seen in his choice of burial—Genesis 47:29-31).

Grandparents should be physically affectionate and verbally affirming of their grandchildren. Finding himself in Joseph’s presence may have prodded powerful memories of Rachel (see verse 7). Joseph’s statement that God had given him children “here” was also amazing to Jacob. In God’s providence, Egypt didn’t rob him of Joseph, but was the extent of fruitfulness to include grandchildren. Our stories may not be as elaborate, but they are no less worthy of praise to God which should flow into affection and affirmation for the gifts that grandchildren are (v.10 and 20).

Questions to Consider: What practical ways are grandparents essential to families? Businesses, non-profit organizations, etc. usually have vision statements to ensure leadership and members know their purpose and where they’re going. Do you have a vision for your family? If you are grandparent, can you articulate this vision to your children/grandchildren? If you are a grandchild, what role do you play in helping to execute the vision for your family? Is the vision for your family God-honoring? If so, how so?

Challenging the Class: Is there no stated vision for your family? How long will you wait till there is one? If you have such a vision, does your family know it? If you have no family of your own, how do you fit into the larger vision of your church family? Have you truly sought the Lord to glorify Him in His family?

Lesson Six: Marks of and Threats to Christian Friendship

Primary Verses: "...But if it pleases my father to do you evil, then I will report it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. And you shall not only show me the kindness of the LORD while I still live, that I may not die; but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the LORD has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth. So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "Let the LORD require it at the hand of David's enemies. Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul." 1 Samuel 20:13-17

Teaching Text: 1 Samuel 20

Supporting Texts: Proverbs 11:13; 15:22; 16:28b; 22:24-25; 25:20; 26:28; 27:5-6, 14

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, whose life spanned the middle of the fourth century into the early 5th century borrowed a definition of friendship from the Roman poet Cicero and "baptized" it with Christian language in this way,

"Friendship is agreement with kindness and affection about things human and divine, in Christ Jesus our Lord who is our real peace."

The Bible has much to say about friendship and there are few pairs of friends from its pages that are more celebrated than David and Jonathan. The teaching text for this week highlights at least four key traits of a successful relationship between friends; commitment, honesty, care, and wise counsel are baseline necessities in any thriving friendship.

Just as there are key traits of friendships, there are also characteristics that threaten to kill, or at least stifle, friendships; lying, anger, jealousy, and betrayal of trust are cancerous to relationships in any form. In a fallen world, friends who have been privileged to share intimate details are potentially harmful when/if they don't take care to steward the information and relationship well. Many friendships have been damaged by carelessness, as much as by *intentional* sabotage.

The story of David and Jonathan makes for a very special case study. Few, if any of us, have ever had to depend so heavily upon a friendship where, literally, life and death hung in the balance. Devotion to a friend has rarely cost or contributed so much. While friendships are often difficult to maintain and costly to keep, so are most precious treasures. Considering how David and Jonathan's friendship survived the sea of stress it sailed in can be an inspiration to us when we are tempted to lose heart about friendships in which we don't endure half the heartache they did.

Questions to Consider: Do you agree with the definition of friendship from Augustine? Why or why not? How do you distinguish between "friends" and "best friends?" How would you characterize the differences between friendships within the Body of Christ and those outside the Body? What parameters, if any, should govern friendships with non-believers?

Challenging the Class: Are you cultivating friendships with fellow believers as best as you could be? Are you prayerful for specific opportunities you have to share the gospel with friends of yours who don't know Christ? What could you do **today** to be a direct blessing to a believing friend? What could you do today to **directly** represent Christ to a non-believing friend?

Lesson Seven: Affirming Singles (The Unmarried)

Primary Verses: “But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say, for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (NASB)

Teaching Text: 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Supporting Texts: 2 Corinthians 11:22-12:10

J. Robin Maxson has co-authored a book with Garry Friesen entitled, “Singleness, Marriage, and the Will of God.” It should be noted at this point, Dr. Maxson is Pastor Emeritus of United Evangelical Free Church in Kalmath Falls, OR, where he served as Senior Pastor from 1976-2013 and is married with adult children. Dr. Friesen, a lifelong single, is a Bible professor at Multnomah University where he has served since 1976. Together, they have identified two flaws in the idea that singleness is merely a holding tank for potential married persons.

The **first flaw** is the question that begins to rear its head amongst family, friends, etc., “What’s wrong with you?” or its corollary, “When are you going to get married?” Marriage *as an expectation*, the authors argue, does serious injury to the single adult, consigning them to some sort of “second-class” status within the Body of Christ and can even turn a legitimate desire for marriage into a demand (as if God *owed* it to them). The truth is, individual adulthood and full value as a person made in God’s image is not measured by conditions outside of the single’s control.

Now from page 132 of their book, “Such a detrimental consequence should be a clue to us that our accepted construct is out of sync with God’s design.” And that is, in fact, the **second flaw**. The good news is we have been wrong. We have inflated a widespread pattern into a universal one—taking what is commonly desired and frequently experienced and making it normative for everyone—without biblical warrant. And we have overlooked important biblical instruction on singleness that would give us a more balanced perspective. The pervasive view that singleness is inferior to that of marriage flies in the face of the teaching (to say nothing of the example) of both Jesus and Paul.”

Questions to Consider: How have you/we contributed to the idea that singleness is inferior to marriage? Are you married? If so, did you view your own singleness as something beneficial or harmful? Are you single? How do you view your singleness? Are there things that we do in churches that unwittingly harm singles? What are practical ways to affirm singles? How can singles, who desire marriage, best maintain the balance between contentment with God and faith to trust Him to provide the spouse of His choosing?

Challenging the Class: The topic of singles can be a very sensitive one. Are you married? Seek to understand today’s single rather than solely relying on your experience as one. Are you single? Don’t dismiss a married person’s perspective simply because they’re not single. The Lord has assigned married and single persons to adorn His Body together.

Lesson Eight: Church Membership

Primary Verses: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3

Teaching Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Supporting Texts: Ephesians 4:1-6

Several passages of Scripture don't make sense without the assumption of church membership:

“Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3). Question: Wouldn't a shepherd need to know the make-up of his flock if he's to effectively care for them?

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17). Question: How would a believer know to whom he/she should submit if he/she were not a member of a local body of believers? Would we expect believers to submit to every elder/pastor, everywhere?

“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you’” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). Question: Doesn't this verse obligate the church at Corinth to expel the wicked from among them? Wouldn't this obligation necessitate knowing exactly *who* is among them?

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17). Question: Can church discipline be exacted on persons outside of the church? Wouldn't this practice require a full knowledge of persons within the local assembly?

The above passages are sampling of scriptures that require knowledge of local church membership in order to obey. It's one thing to insist on church membership with friends and family, who like to debate the issue. It's another thing to demonstrate the Biblical command(s) for membership.

Questions to Consider: What would you consider to be the greatest benefit you've received from being a church member? What top three benefits make your list? What is the greatest challenge you've faced as a result of being a church member? What are your top three challenges? What character traits are necessary to make a good church member?

Challenging the Class: In many ways, a church is no better than its individual members. As a member, how are you improving yourself to make your church better? In what ways can your church help make you a better member?