



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

**Year Four
Second Quarter – Part II
Christian Character**

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Second Quarter – Christian Character

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Lesson Five: Is Your Focus Increasingly on Christ and Decreasing on Possessions?

Primary Verses: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1 Timothy 6:6-9 (KJV)

Teaching Text: Luke 12:13-40

Supporting Texts: 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Learning how to argue fairly is part of maturity and growing up. Few things are as frustrating as being in a verbal disagreement where the other side is either unable or unwilling to interact with your position, but instead unfairly mischaracterizes your stance. A person who doesn't like going to the beach shouldn't automatically be seen as “judging” persons who go to the beach. A mother who doesn't want her son going into the military may have several reasons without a lack of patriotism making that list. In the same way, a discussion/lesson about a decreasing attachment on worldly possessions shouldn't be taken as promoting poverty among God's people.

Have you noticed there are very few warnings against poverty in the Bible? But in contrast, there are warnings against riches and an unhealthy desire to gain them all over the scriptures (Psalm 62:10, Proverbs 23:4, Proverbs 30:8-9, Matthew 6:19-24, Matthew 13:22, Mark 10:25, Hebrews 13:5, etc.). The Lord knew the fallen race made in His image wouldn't generally (if ever) *strive* to be poor, but on more occasions than not, their passion would be for riches. Therefore, as a faithful God Who sought to protect His people from worthless idols, He ensured that we were warned over and over against craving wealth.

But in a world that puts premium value on gadgets and machinery barely in use or not even in existence 100 years ago, watch how people fidget and faces turn sour at the mere reading of God's loving warnings against possessions. This is not a new problem in the modern world, but an old issue from ancient times. After all, didn't our first parents trade in the whole planet and dare Death in the face for the sake of possessing fruit that was appealing to their eyes?

Questions to Consider: Consider the parable of the rich fool who tore down his barns to build bigger ones. How can we accurately distinguish between good stewardship and plain ol' greed? If, as the owner of his estate, he could see his harvest was likely to surpass his capacity to store it, what was wrong with building new barns? Are there clues in the story that may explain why God ultimately judged him as being a fool? As Christians, are there ways that we fool ourselves into sinning while telling ourselves we're doing the right thing? What safeguards can we rely on to ensure we are not calling evil good and good evil with respect to our approach towards possessions?

Challenging the Class: What practical steps have you made to earn the wealth for this world? Are you rich toward God (Luke 12:21)? What practical and concrete steps have you made to become rich toward Him? How aggressively are you pursuing one investment strategy compared with the other?

Lesson Six: Are You Increasing in Love for God's People?

Primary Verses: "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brothers' righteous. Do not be surprised brothers, the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 3:11-15 (ESV)

Teaching Text: 1 John 4:7-21

Supporting Texts: Hebrews 13, 1 John 3:11-24

"In the New Testament, love is more of a verb than a noun. It has more to do with acting than with feeling. The call to love is not so much a call to a certain state of feeling as it is to a quality of action." —R.C. Sproul

"I love you" is one of the most repeated, but also most misunderstood phrases in modern English. We love basketball, we love sewing, we love chocolate cake, we love our parents... but though the same word is used over and over, we clearly (hopefully) pour different intent and content into the word "love." It is often difficult to express our love because the more and more self-centered our society becomes, we are able to demonstrate love's intrinsic goodness less and less. Lamentably, this is true even in the church because of the prevailing winds of culture. We are often devoid of a biblical standard of love as if the Bible had no guidelines for measuring and defining it. Make no mistake, the God of love is not short on words concerning how His children are to live in love towards one another.

The fact that love is difficult to measure/quantify does not mean that it is invisible. While being intangible, there are very tangible ways in which love manifests itself among believers. From the very beginning of the New Testament Church, believers were noted for the voluntary, wide-spread practice of sharing their property and possessions (Acts 2:44-47). The Apostle Paul never apologized for taking up a collection in Corinth for needy Jewish believers in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3), but instead taught that Gentile believers should do so happily and hilariously (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

Questions to Consider: How many times does the phrase "love one another" appear in the teaching text for this week? How does John use "love one another" as a diagnostic exam? Since we are saved by grace and not works, how should we understand 1 John 4:20-21? How does the teaching text help us distinguish between love from a worldly perspective and love as God would have us to love? Apart from God's Word, can we know God's standard for love?

Challenging the Class: Love may be from the heart but it is almost never invisible to the eye or empty-handed. If we give ourselves the right to insist on true love in word and in deed towards us, certainly Christ has a right to expect it of us towards Himself and towards His bride, the Church.

Lesson Seven: Are You Willing to Suffer for the Name of Jesus?

Primary Verses: “They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Acts 5:40-42 (NASB)

Teaching Text: Acts 4:1-31

Supporting Texts: Acts 5:17-42, 2 Corinthians 4

Signs and wonders produce intrigue and interest on the part of those who witness them (or *think* they witness them). While some are encouraged in their faith, most are merely amused and pleased that something spectacular has broken into the monotony of their lives. But when we look at the life of Jesus and the Apostles, we find an amazing principle: miracles, mixed with God’s truth, produce opposition for the one(s) through whom the sign was produced in similar proportion to the blessing and deliverance the recipient enjoyed. In other words, while signs amuse some and bless others, the preaching of the gospel invariably brings trouble on the proclaimer.

The context for today’s lesson is evidence of the principle explained above. Peter and John heal a man who was born lame. In an instant, a man who not only had bad feet but never learned to coordinate his lower limbs is seen “jumping and leaping and praising God” in the temple. It is undeniably a miracle, but by preaching the gospel by the Holy Spirit’s power, Peter and John exalt Jesus as the crucified and risen Redeemer the Father had promised Israel through the prophets. This act brought severe opposition, and little wonder at that, for it was our Lord Himself Who said,

“Remember that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake because they do not know the One Who sent Me.” John 15:20-21

Questions to Consider: Think on the verses from John 15. Does persecution come because of a lack of understanding the gospel or does it come by failure to know the Origin/Originator of the message? In Acts 4, what specific portion of Peter and John’s preaching disturbed the Jewish leaders? Why do you think that particular aspect of the gospel message was most offensive to the religious leaders of that day? Examine Acts 4:16-17. What might those verses imply about effective ministry in the midst of persecution? What can we learn from Acts 4 about the proper response to persecution for the sake of Christ?

Challenging the Class: The overwhelming testimony of the New Testament assures/warns us that believers in Christ who are about the Lord’s business can expect persecution in a myriad of forms. While our list of trials may not be as extensive as some (see 2 Corinthians 11:22-32), facing opposition to the gospel is certain. How does your reaction to persecution match with that of the Apostles? How informed are you of persecution against the church around the world? Are you or are you not your brother’s keeper?

Lesson Eight: Are You a Disciple of Christ Eagerly Making Disciples for Christ?

Primary Verses: “Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.” Acts 18:24-26 (NIV)

Teaching Text: Acts 18:18-19:10

Supporting Texts: Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 14:8-28

In the words of one urban poet, “Men lie, women lie, but numbers don’t.” It can be certain when numbers express a factual quantity or countable value, numbers don’t lie. Numbers can, however, be very misleading. And sometimes, the larger and more impressive the number is, the less meaningful it is.

For example, many of us remember Billy Graham and his enormous “preaching crusades.” According to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, the senior statesman of Christian conservatives preached to over 215,000,000 persons in his lifetime. Luis Palau, sometimes called “the Latin Billy Graham,” has preached to over 25,000,000 persons in the course of his ministry. The Promise Keeper movement claimed attendance of nearly 5,000,000 attendees over the course of its run.

We must truly ponder two questions: What actual ministries/ministers are overseeing the real, life-on-life discipleship of all these people? If there aren’t real ways of following-up to encourage, teach, correct, warn, and equip these persons, is it really effective ministry? This question is not written to attack, demean, or discredit any ministry or any person’s efforts to spread the gospel. However, we must learn to embrace the entire challenge of the Great Commission. We were not only commanded to “preach the gospel to every nation,” but we are also to “teach them to observe [obey] all that I [Christ] have commanded you.” Until we have done all that we can to secure the gap between gospel exposure and gospel growth, we have **not** done all we can to fulfill the Great Commission.

Questions to Consider: Looking at the teaching text, which verses specifically speak or allude to discipleship as a priority? Examine the example of Apollos. How is it possible to be “mighty in the Scriptures” but still need others to help you explain the same Holy Scriptures “more accurately?” How long was Paul in Ephesus? Why was he there for that length of time and what lessons can we learn to inform us about our commitment to missions work today (Acts 20:16-38 may be helpful to consider here!)?

Challenging the Class: It has been said, but the saying definitely warrants repeating: Jesus was in the business of making disciples and not merely converts. While it is absolutely impossible to have an unconverted disciple, there are converts who are barely Christian for lack of emphasis on sanctification and spiritual maturity. Christian disciplines and increasing Christlikeness require the Holy Spirit’s power *but also our intentionality*. What are YOU doing as a disciple of Christ to be “hands-on” in the growth and development of believers into true discipleship? Are you someone’s Paul? Are you someone’s Timothy?

Make Disciples

by Dave Eby

When I started seminary in 1967, Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20 to "make disciples" baffled me. There was something cryptic and mysterious about it, seemingly understood by only an initiated few. At the same time, Jesus' words demanded comprehension and performance, and this started a pilgrimage of seeking to understand and practice "making disciples." After thirty-four years of pastoring in the United States and now after seven years as a seminary teacher in Uganda, I am still learning.

Let's look together at three simple questions: (1) What is a disciple? (2) How are disciples made? (3) What kinds of disciple-making are there?

The Greek word we translate as *disciple* means *learner*. A disciple is a learner from the Lord Jesus. A learner is a listener and a practitioner. The Great Commission is a command to bring people to Christ to listen, learn, and practice. A disciple of Jesus becomes His learner forever.

Among the things that disciples are to be learning from Christ are:

1. To deny self and to follow Jesus with singular loyalty (Luke 9:23- 26; 14:26).
2. To hate sin and love holiness.
3. To serve and love Christ's church with all her imperfections.
4. To love the lost and the nations and to have a passion for gospel advance.
5. To "adorn" Christ's gospel with good deeds of love, justice, and mercy (Titus 2:10,12, 14).
6. To live by faith in Christ and the gospel (Rom. 1:17).
7. To rejoice that the humanly unattainable requirements of a clean record, new heart, and new power to live a holy life have been purchased and provided by Christ alone through grace alone, and they are received by faith alone. Regeneration, justification, and sanctification are all free gifts.
8. To boast only in the cross and the gospel and to flee all pride and self-achievement (Phil. 3:3-9).
9. To hope in Christ for future glory and grace, a hope that sustains in the many afflictions of this brief sojourn in the "valley of the shadow of death."

Disciples are made through the ministry of the Word entrusted to the church, including preaching, teaching, evangelism, and counseling. The Word teaches, reproves, corrects, and trains in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Word makes disciples and Christ makes disciples through the Word. He uses His servants to administer His Word formally in worship services, training classes, Bible study groups, counseling sessions, seminary classrooms, and evangelistic missions, or to preach it informally in conversations in any setting.

Making disciples is preeminently the responsibility of the church. Making disciples involves exhorting from the Word, calling people to become those who learn from Christ; teaching people what Christ has commanded; teaching people to obey all that Christ has commanded; teaching them to obey in the

context of church life; and summoning the church to command all nations to follow Jesus and become His learners.

Let's look at three kinds of discipleship:

Initial discipleship is winning disciples through evangelism, bringing sinners to Christ as learners via first-time repentance, faith, and submission to grace.

Normal discipleship takes place in the congregation. It is teaching believers all that Christ has commanded about all of life. Hungry, teachable, faithful believers will be continual learners from Jesus as they sit under the preaching and teaching of God's Word and become doers of it ([James 1:22](#)). They will grow in the life of ongoing faith, repentance, ministry, and mission. They will be equipped, deployed, and sent to contribute to the mission of God in this world, which is to make disciples whom Christ has redeemed from every nation, building Christ's church among all peoples, and calling them into the fullness of the kingdom of God.

Restorative discipleship is learning from Christ how to deal with problems that arise from remaining and indwelling sin. Restorative discipleship calls for specific teaching, reproof, correction, and training that will address these specific problems. The goals of restorative discipleship are similar to the goals of all discipleship: to re-establish the believer in usefulness and humble learning from Christ in order to become like Christ in heart, conduct, and mission.

Bringing people to Christ to become learners is a high calling and a privilege. Human disciple-makers are powerless in themselves, yet they are accountable to Christ, and they are active in Him. So, move ahead in faithful obedience to preach the Word. The exalted Christ ultimately makes disciples as He causes His Word to germinate and grow through your work. Through you, Christ will win, build, equip, restore, and send learners to do His mission in this needy world.

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