

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
January 25, 2015
“The Disciplines of Disciples of Christ”

Memory Verse: *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* Hebrews 12:11

Last week’s lesson was about the Relationship of Disciples toward the World. Did you make time this week to share your faith? Did you get to meet anyone’s needs? It’s not bragging to say you helped someone, or you witnessed to someone, whether they’re family or stranger. If you were able to show love as a Disciple of Christ to someone in the World this week, then honor God by telling us about the opportunity He gave you and how you took advantage of what He arranged for you! We’ll celebrate and praise God with you!

THIS WEEK AND NEXT WEEK we’ll be learning about some of the Disciplines of Disciples of Christ.

Some Disciplines of Disciples of Christ

There are any number of spiritual disciplines that can be called by different names, classified by different activities or practices, or even differentiate themselves by their focus. For example, what we could call Solitude can be a part of individual prayer, study, worship, etc., depending on what activity you are focusing on whether it be communing with God, reading His Word, or just singing, being joyful or showing respect for Him in a personal, private way. All these things can be done in groups as well, but then we obviously wouldn’t call it solitude, but probably something like “corporate” prayer, etc. Our point is that this lesson doesn’t give a comprehensive list of spiritual disciplines. Bible Study, Meditation, Contemplation, Fellowship, Celebration... There’s a ton we chose not to include this week, but that doesn’t mean they are any less important. The ones included are ones that we have mentioned in recent lessons and a few we haven’t, but they are all connected.

Giving: *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* Luke 6:38

Giving is listed as a discipline because, although it should arise from a genuine joy of the heart, it must be an action that is taken deliberately and sometimes in spite of competing feelings and circumstances. Giving regularly does draw us closer to God! Giving doesn’t just happen spontaneously. God wants us to be aware of what we’re doing as we make sacrifices in our lifestyle in order to advance and invest in His Kingdom.

Simplicity: *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* Mat 6:33

All that said, we hear and have heard a lot about the importance of a few specific types of spiritual disciplines that are very crucial to growing as Disciples of Christ. For example, we just finished a pretty intense study of the discipline of **“Giving”** and its root, **“Simplicity”** or living simple, focused lives. Are there some things that God has shown you over the last few months that need to be removed from your life because they are hindering your life with business and chaos? They aren’t sinful in themselves but they prevent you from doing what is best! Prayerfully commit to laying them down today. Simplicity is not easy, it requires learning. It takes a focus upon simple necessities, reinforcing good habits and concentration on not only remembering to give, but to maintain the right mindset while we give. It takes work.

Submission: *Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." John 14:23*

Is there an authority in your life that you need to commit to honoring and joyfully submitting to their leadership and direction? Pray for that person by name each day and ask for God's help in intentionally placing yourself under their leadership. Submitting allows us to Serve!

Service: *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." Mark 9:35.)*

Also, we have studied for the past few weeks the relationship that we, as Jesus' Disciples, should have with Jesus, with other Disciples and with the world of folks around us. Those relationships involve "**Submission**" of our wills to God's will and "**Service**" to God by doing what He would have us to do. A lot of times, that involves submitting to and serving our Christian brothers and sisters in love, and doing the same for those in the world around us, day to day. Submitting and Serving others is NOT a natural impulse. Think about it. The first thing we learned as a baby is that if we cry, somebody will come and take care of US. Now a baby NEEDS to think like that because it can't take care of itself. However, there comes a time when we must mature and learn to quit thinking only of ourselves, but to begin to use our gifts and time and resources to help others. That takes a lot of learning and practice to shake off that helpless, self-centeredness and to embrace and God-centered and Others-centered mentality, but that's what God says it takes, if we want to progress in His kingdom.

Confession: *When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Luke 5:8*

Worship: *23"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24*

We've also learned that part of our relationship with God that leads us to Submission and Service is "**Confession**" of our sins and the "**Worship**" of God Himself. Confession is the result of our beginning to truly know ourselves. Though we are changed into new creatures by Christ's salvation for us, we remain creatures that are tainted by carnal thoughts, actions and impulses, and we will be until Christ returns to renew all things. The more we realize that and more truthfully identify with our current situation, the more we must confess it to God. I don't mean confess as in "God forgive me for being a low-down dirty sinner," (although even if we could say that over and over again for eternity, it wouldn't fix things. Only the power of Jesus' sacrifice could save and change us.) Confession means that we begin to see ourselves as God sees us and we admit our faults and our lowliness to God. We confess the Truth. That righteous humility allows us to admit our dependence on Him more and more, which lead us to... you guessed it... Worship HIM more and more! How could we not?! Anybody who will say "I'm really an okay person..." doesn't understand themselves very well, and as a result doesn't understand worship very well either. How could they? They might know that God is greater than them, but they've got no clue as the magnitude of that Truth. We'll never be able to give God all the glory He deserves, but the more we're willing to recognize the gulf God had to cross between His ultimate moral perfection and our abject, rank depravity in order to save us, then at least we can get a little closer to understanding and giving Him his due glory and "Worth-ship" (that's where the word Worship comes from, by the way. Fun fact!)

If we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and will forgive those sins and clean us up in the process, 1 John 1:9. Our regular habit of confessing sins to Jesus should not be performed without searching our heart, but rather

after a prayer of searching, we confess specific sins to Jesus in order to receive grace and mercy from Him. Confess your true condition to Jesus as an activity of worship. Our sinfulness leads us back to Jesus and Jesus always leads us to pronounce His worth as our savior and Lord!

Prayer: *“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”* Matt. 6:6

Fasting: *17 “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* Matt 6:17-18

We’ve been taught about “Prayer” and “Fasting” in church. We know not to use prayer like a wish-list to Santy-Claus, nor to use it as our Cosmic Complaint Box to the Upstairs Management. Such views of prayer are, ineffectual, laughable and insulting to God. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He stressed communication to God: Being thankful, Being respectful, Worshiping God, Asking for Provision from above, Seeking His Will and Asking for God’s protection in the act of doing God’s Will. (Matt. 6:9-13) Now we know Jesus was not afraid to voice His concerns about the specifics of God’s Will (*“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* Matt. 26:39) but we also know that Jesus ultimately submitted to and relied on God for everything. Some believers have gone as far as to say that true, God-honoring, God-seeking prayer is like an anchor between Heaven (where God’s will is done) and Earth (where we seek God’s will to be done like it is in Heaven) and for that moment in time when we can truly commune with God and we find joy and peace and all manner of blessing through our prayer time, it’s like Heaven and Earth are connecting or overlapping because we are obeying God and seeking Him like He commanded us to and He is rewarding us with His presence like He said he would. (Matt. 6:6) Some have said that brief connection of spiritual power and rest and peace and understanding is just a small taste of what Heaven will be like all the time. If this really is the case, then it’s not surprising that prayer can be one of the most transformative disciplines a Christian can undertake!

Fasting, we know, is NOT some magical ritual that earns you extra points with God so He’ll give you what you want. It’s also not some badge to wear to show yourself as Holler-Roller Supreme. The Bible talks of Fasting as the putting off of Earthly needs and desires for a time (mainly food) in order to demonstrate sincerity and passion for spiritual needs and a need for God and His Love and Deliverance. Evil people who humbled themselves and fasted and prayed to God were spared. Jesus also talked of it as a spiritual weapon to drive out the influence of evil in our lives. (Matt. 17:14-29). Jesus also said if you’re going to fast, make it a private thing and don’t make a big show like a hypocrite. (Matt. 6:16)

Solitude: *“After [Jesus] had dismissed [the crowds], he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was [still] there alone.”* Matthew 14:23

Finally, we can take a look at one we don’t discuss much, but Jesus found essential: Solitude. In the book of Mark alone there are over 15 instances that describe Jesus going off alone. They generally sound something like this, “Jesus went out beside the lake” or “Jesus went out to a solitary place” or “Jesus went out to the mountain side.” So what, Jesus was a nature-lover, right? Maybe, but he wasn’t just there to admire the scenery. Most of the time, Jesus was spending time in prayer, but sometimes He was just mentioned as sitting down or resting. Sometimes he is described as trying to find some alone time among all his followers and often the Disciples worked hard to keep the pressing crowds away so that Jesus could have some personal time (even though he didn’t always approve of their methods or restrictions (*13Then some children were brought to Him so that He*

might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 14But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." 15After laying His hands on them, He departed from there. Matthew 19:13-15).

So Jesus needed to get away every so often to pray and recharge and relax from the duties of his ministry and his teaching. This was the Son of God. THE Word of Creation. The Logos, the word that was with God in the beginning and was God... and He needed to catch a nap every once in a while. He could raise the dead and heal any dysfunction and do spiritual warfare with any demon and probably all before breakfast... but all that work took its toll. Jesus came to Earth to save the world... but he didn't come to Earth to be "Superman." He didn't come to be invincible. You know why? Because we're not invincible. He wanted to know our weakness, our aches and pains and weariness. He loved us so much that He, the Almighty, Christ Jesus *"6Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!"* Philippians 2:6-8. The context Paul is using there is for the Philippians to model their relationships with each other on that love and Humility!

So if Jesus need rest, so do you. If Jesus got burned out, so will you. If Jesus needed a change of scenery and a nap occasionally, so do you. The idea of burning your candle at both ends and work-work-working your fingers to the bone and never taking a break ever as being a thing that honors God is a Myth. Being a "Spiritual Workaholic" is a Lie. God made the Sabbath for a purpose, and that purpose was for Man. Know who said that? Jesus. *Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."* Mark 2:27.

Wait... Resting is a discipline? Yes indeed. The reason it's a discipline is because it requires focus. Whether you're taking time out to be alone and relax or be alone with God and just pray or plan, or even taking a vacation, you have to use your downtime constructively and you have to keep focused on God, even when you're not in active ministry. Have you ever taken a vacation and by the time you got back it took you a few days to get back into the routine of normal life? Yes, well that can happen spiritually as well, and if you're not careful, you can lose ground on spiritual growth God has planned for you. Some people like to take a break to "let it all go" but if you're not careful, you may not be able to get it all back! Unfocused rest, (and I mean time taken as a break from a demanding ministry) downtime without prayer and spiritual connection with God can cause us to get lazy, sloppy or just lose whatever advantages God had given us up to this point in our walk with Him. So just as much as we use any spiritual discipline to grow closer to God, we need to use our instances of solitude to improve our relationship with Him and take from Him the rest He wants us to have: Rest in Him.

Take Home:

- This week, take any of the above disciplines (or another one that's on your mind) and make a plan to pursue progress and growth in that discipline. If it's Bible Study, set a time for reading and meditating once a day for a week...
- Then stick to it. If you need help making a plan, or setting a goal, talk to a spiritual mentor or brother or sister in Christ who might be further along than you in that discipline and who can help you make progress for God.