

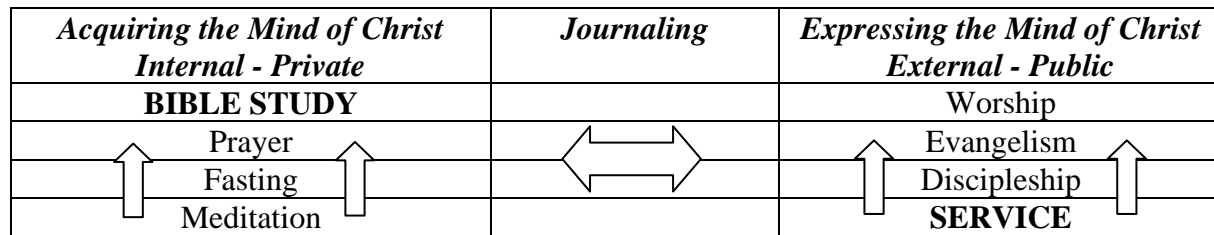
## Spiritual Habits

The Christian disciplines are intended to instill beneficial habits in believers. We could call them “spiritual habits.” The specific habits we want to practice are bible study, prayer, fasting, meditation, *journaling*, worship, evangelism, discipleship, and service. That makes four private habits, and four public habits, with journaling forming the bridge between the two sets.

The goal for the private habits is to acquire the mind of Christ. The goal for the public habits is to express it. Journaling is the map and the record of our progress. There we can catalog our expectations and questions, outlining what we hope to discover and accomplish each day. It is also where we record the answers we find, whether we receive them immediately or after patient waiting. It marks the successes we enjoy, and the failures we endure. It becomes a textbook of the lessons we learn as we apply what we study to the way that we live.

- Prayer, fasting, and meditation are focused on our *bible study*. They help us *listen*.
- *Service* furthers our worship, evangelism, and discipleship. It sweetens our *voice*.

We need both the private and the public disciplines to develop and maintain our biblical fellowship with God and with each other.



These are all activities that we can do, rather than attitudes we can hope for. Attitudes follow actions, not the other way around. We are creatures of will. Although we have minds (intellect) and hearts (passion), we are primarily willful. We *choose* what to study, what to think, and how to feel. We are not to be passive receivers of every wind of teaching (Eph. 4:14), nor are we to be controlled by our passions (Gal. 5:24). We direct our passion toward a goal that our mind has selected, and our will has determined to attain. This is what it means to be purposeful.<sup>1</sup> The spiritual habits train us to choose the right path, and then passionately pursue Christ down that path. This is the process Paul describes in Romans 7-8 as we become Spirit-driven. We choose to submit to the Spirit, because we *know* we have been freed from our bondage to sin.<sup>2</sup> That is how factual truth sets us emotionally free to do what is pleasing in God’s sight.

There are other disciplines mentioned by Richard Foster in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*: simplicity, solitude, confession, submission, guidance (by the H.S.), and celebration. These are actually part of the other disciplines, so we’ll address them as we practice the others.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 11:23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 6:6-7 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

We could include godliness, obedience, stewardship, fellowship, learning, loving, trusting, etc., but these *result* from the disciplines. They are not disciplines in themselves.

### ***Growing through Interaction***

Just as a husband learns about his wife by living and interacting with her, we learn about our spiritual brothers and sisters by living and interacting with them. We adjust to one another. However, it's not enough to observe each another, or discover what we like or dislike about each other, so that we can accommodate one another's needs. We're not building social bonds in order to belong to an extended family, or to gain a support group to help us through our personal trials. We get these things, but that's not what the church is for. We're building spiritual bonds because we *are* an extended family, and because we need others to encourage us to spread the Gospel in the face of stiff opposition.<sup>3</sup> God didn't put us together with other believers just to make us feel good about ourselves. **Our relationships in the Body exist to further the kingdom.**

Yes, we are essential to one another's growth, and we are necessary ingredients in one another's well-being. But it is by furthering the kingdom that we grow closer, stronger, wiser, gentler, and more loving. Furthering the kingdom is what helps us learn more about *God*. Our relationships don't give us value, meaning, contentment, or purpose. We can only find these things in the pursuit of knowing God. Our goal is not to build character. Our goal is to build God's kingdom. Building character will happen along the way.<sup>4</sup> It is a serendipity of the journey. The purpose of loving one another is not to satisfy an emotional need. It is to reveal God, in all his majesty and glory, in all his love and compassion, and in all his wisdom and justice.

That's what the bible is for. It describes the kingdom of God to us, the will of God, the purpose of God, and the mystery of the ages. It describes what we are like in our sinful nature, and what we are supposed to be like in our spiritual nature. As we move away from the one and toward the other, we grow in grace, and together we glorify God.<sup>5</sup> Bible study isn't incidental to that growth, as if it were an optional pastime. It is foundational. But so is the interaction we have with other believers. We don't know the bible until we do the bible. And we do the bible with others in the Body of Christ interactively. We pursue and practice righteousness face to face with other people.<sup>6</sup> That is how together we become a house of God that is built on the rock.<sup>7</sup> There is a synergy between studying the bible privately, and practicing fellowship through the public

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<sup>3</sup> Matt 5:11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely **for My sake**." There are trials that we all undergo in life, and God is with us to comfort us through those difficult circumstances. The church is there to comfort and encourage us as well. But the Church's main purpose is to represent Christ on earth. It is the instrument through which the kingdom expands and God's truth is made known to the world. In the course of that evangelization, we will always encounter opposition. The church is there to strengthen, comfort, and encourage each of us in that struggle. *That* is its primary role. And *that* is why we have been called together.

<sup>4</sup> Matt 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 3:18 grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Rom 15:5-6 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Tim 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Heb 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord... 1 John 3:10 Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

<sup>7</sup> Matt 7:24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and **does** them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock ..."

disciplines.<sup>8</sup> These two activities feed and stimulate each other. **We are insufficient to come to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ by ourselves.**<sup>9</sup> We lack the requisite parts.<sup>10</sup> The Body of Christ was given to us for the very same reason that Eve was given to Adam. Because she was made from him, she also completed him. She was created to help Adam fulfill God’s purposes for him; she was the only one fit to do so (Gen. 2:20). She took away his loneliness, filling his days with companionship, sharing and aiding his discoveries (Gen. 2:18). That is exactly what the Body of Christ does for those who are in Christ, who share his identity, and are called by God.<sup>11</sup> Like Adam and Eve, we are one flesh (Gen. 2:24); we treat each another accordingly (Eph. 5:28, 32).

New believers, growing believers, and mature believers are not on separate paths. It is the same path for all of us. It is a shared journey as we walk up the hill of the Lord. We have to learn to deal with each other at the same time that we are learning to walk up the hill. In fact, learning to deal with each other is *how* we learn to walk up the hill. We aren’t obstacles to each other on the journey. We *are* the journey. We need others, and they need us.

### Theory and Practice

This journey that we take together leads us into fellowship with God: “that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ” (1Jn. 1:3). What does fellowship with God look like? As we heard from J. Dwight Pentecost in the last lesson, the essence of fellowship consists of being in harmony with the mind, heart, and will of God. *That’s* what we’re after. *That’s* the information we want to get out of Scripture. But each of us gets only a piece of the pie. It is together that we begin to assemble the parts into a whole. By sharing these things between us, we gain fellowship with God, and with each other. Fellowship is a consequence, an outworking, of our shared knowledge of God. When we are devoted to being in harmony with God, we come into harmony with each other. We return to the fellowship of the Garden. It becomes like a pasture that we can enter and exit through Christ, the gate.<sup>12</sup>

That’s Part One of the disciplines: *getting information*. Part Two is *acting on that information*. We need to apply what we learn to our daily circumstances and our relationships.

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:6-7 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 1:5-8 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [full knowledge: epignosis]

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor 12:4-11 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

<sup>11</sup> The word for “church” is the Greek *ecclesia*, meaning those who are called out.

<sup>12</sup> Jn. 10:7-9 – this describes our life on earth, not our future state – we “come in and go out” of this gate. It is describing our spiritual fellowship. We come into the pasture to be cared for, comforted, and nourished by our Good Shepherd. It is a way to be in the world but not of it.

Two things happen when we do that: we discover if we really understand what we have read in the bible, and we discover how well we are learning to do what the bible teaches us to do. This two-pronged feedback clarifies our understanding, and measures our obedience. It takes us back to the bible with additional questions, or with keener insight that adds to our understanding. The word for this kind of process is “growth.” To be effective students, what we privately learn from the bible must be publicly applied to our worship, discipleship, evangelism, and service.

What about family, workplace, and community? While we do have “fellowship” in these environments, *biblical* fellowship can only take place within the Body. The things we learn about our relationships in the Body can benefit us in other areas of our life. Yet, without a shared body of truth, there can be no biblical fellowship. And biblical fellowship is what the disciplines are designed to produce.

## The Disciplines

***Bible Study*** - We’ve been studying the theology of the bible, but we haven’t actually practiced bible study yet. That will come. Bible study is intentional; it has specific goals. When we read, we don’t just read. We read purposefully. There is something very specific we want to get out of the bible, as was mentioned. We are reading for content. We’re not after the stories or their moral lessons so much as we want to learn what they have to tell us about God and about each other. Why? Because we are a unity. That was the point of the last lesson dealing with covenant and community. And so we read the bible for the purpose of learning how to fellowship with God, and with each other. We also want to learn about our obligations concerning the world, and how to respond to the circumstances of our life. For the mechanics of Bible Study, review the lesson *How to Read the Bible*. However, the mechanics alone won’t do us much good. Knowing vocabulary, grammar, and syntax may help us read, but they won’t give us understanding.

It’s like learning to ride a bike. We can read about people who ride bikes. We can read about the theory of bike riding in general. We can read physics books about balance and inertia, pulleys and wheels. None of that will help us ride the bike. We need a book about the bike we own, how it works, and how to maintain our bike. We need to read purposefully about the gear shift and brakes, adjusting the seat and pedals, how and when to turn the light on, which side of the road to ride on, and how to sound the horn or bell. We aren’t doing general reading, but applied reading. There are things we need to know so that we can ride our bike safely and effectively. Then we need to get out the bike, and begin to ride. First we learn what we need to know, then we apply what we learn, and finally we have some fun.

***Prayer*** – When we pray, we may be involved in a number of different activities, each of them prayerful, but directed toward different ends. Prayer is not one thing. It is many things. First and foremost, it must be Scriptural. If we don’t know God’s intent for prayer, we won’t be able to pray effectively. The content of our prayer, and our purpose for praying, would be misguided if we didn’t know what or how to pray. Prayer, therefore, should flow from what we read in the bible. Jesus’ disciples asked him how to pray. He didn’t say they were wrong to ask. Instead, he told them: “Our Father, who is in heaven, may your name be kept holy...” (hallowed). Right out of the gate, a question may arise as to how to keep his name holy – what does holiness involve? Is it something I think, something I say, or something I do that keeps it holy? How in the world

can I fail to keep it holy? Or, how can I make it holy? And so I enter into prayer, asking as I pray, letting my meditations spill into my supplications. I pray for wisdom, guidance, and understanding, especially in reading the bible. I ask questions, even as I make my requests known to God. **Prayer is asking.**

Sometimes prayer is simply venting at God. David did that a lot through his Psalms. If we can't open up to someone else about how we feel, or if we can't confess a particular sin to anyone, we can still be perfectly open with God. He is our Creator, and the lover of our soul. He is our Father. Our relationship with him is not jeopardized by our words. When we don't know the deceit of our own heart, he knows.<sup>13</sup> We can ask him to reveal it to us.<sup>14</sup>

Prayer can be a flurry of praise and jubilation, deep-seated delight at what God has done, or who he is. I may catch a glimpse of his glory or his holiness, which can drive me to my knees or make me leap with glee. I become David dancing in abandon down the streets of Jerusalem, for I have found the Ark of the Covenant, and returned it to the City of God.

I can fall down before God in tears and agony, in all my despair and pain, seeking comfort for my soul, questioning and challenging his sovereignty in my life. That too is prayer.

Prayer is having a conversation with God. We speak to him through prayer. He speaks to us through his word. That takes us back to bible study. I need to be drenched in God's word if I am to hear him clearly, and speak to him appropriately. He will bring to mind those passages of the bible that relate to my prayer. The Spirit cannot remind us of what we have not read. If we are ignorant of God's word, he will seem silent, when in fact he is not silent at all.

Let me end with some cautions: Be slow to speak and quick to listen in prayer. Never say, "Hear O God, for thy servant speaks!" Instead, ask of him, "Speak O God, for thy servant listens!"<sup>15</sup> Don't be presumptuous in what you ask for. Even Christ prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."<sup>16</sup> God doesn't owe us anything. Prayer is designed to change us, not God.

**Meditation** – There is nothing mystical in meditation. We aren't trying to slow our heartbeat, or sense the blood coursing through our veins. We aren't trying to attain a state of nirvana, in which our spirit somehow rises above the weak vessel of our body. We are mulling over God's word in our heart, and mind. We are trying to understand what God has said, what it means, or how it applies to us. Meditation is "mirroring" God's word. This has two senses.

In one sense, the bible is a mirror showing *us* two reflections. The first is how we look in the sight of God: dearly loved and cherished. We meditate on how we look to God, considering the precious price that Christ paid to redeem us from our slavery to sin. The other is what the reflection of a child of God looks like. And so we meditate on what it means to be in Christ, to enjoy the freedom of his righteousness. These reflections are accurate in every detail, without

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<sup>13</sup> Jer. 17:9

<sup>14</sup> Ps. 139:23

<sup>15</sup> Ps 4:4 Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Ps 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God;

<sup>16</sup> Lk. 22:42

facades or white-washed walls. In the one, we acknowledge who we already are. In the other, we visualize who we are meant to be: fully mature and fruitful. When we are able to reconcile these two images with what is being done in us to make us grow, we will find contentment and peace.

In another sense, the bible is a mirror showing *God* two reflections. The one is a reflection of his own glory, which exists in eternity. God's word, which lives in us, never returns to him without effect. It does what he intends it to do.<sup>17</sup> And so this image reflects the Spirit's work in us, which is to God's glory. We meditate on the fact that God's Spirit lives in us, and works in us to will and to act according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). The other image is a reflection of God's word in our life. It is the seed of his word finding good soil in which to flourish and become fruitful. In other words, it is meditating on how we intend to respond to what God has written. It is preparing ourselves to demonstrate to God that we took to heart what he has said.

***Fasting*** – Although we usually think of this as not eating for awhile, this is akin to prayer. It is many things. Fasting is a way to separate ourselves from the world, not from our physical body. We are not trying to develop will-power.<sup>18</sup> It is not a way to beat our body into submission, in spite of what Paul seems to say on the matter.<sup>19</sup> He was talking about conforming his body to the Spirit, forcing his fleshly desires to submit to the desires of the Spirit. Don't misconstrue what he had to say as some kind of asceticism. Remember, he's the one who denounced asceticism to the Colossians. When we fast, we are saying to God, "You are sufficient for me." That's all we're doing. Now, how do we fast?

We can deny ourselves food, or types of food, or drinks, or types of drinks, or movies, or types of movies... You get the idea. It is choosing to control, not limit, what goes into our body and our mind. **It is not self-denial. It is self-control.**

*Simplicity* is a type of fasting. Simplicity is living without a lot of luxuries or gadgets. Living a simple life means living without a lot of clutter. Clutter requires maintenance, and maintenance costs time, and money. Clutter is a distraction. To put it another way, the more simply we live, the less drain we have on our resources. It is an exercise in proper stewardship. Simplicity frees us to do other things with what we have. The fewer worldly distractions we have, the less prone we are to choose the things of the world over the things of God.

*Fasting is reallocating our resources.* It is taking from what we have to meet a need elsewhere. **Tithing**, is a type of fasting. A **mercy** visit to the hospital, is a type of fasting. **Giving** to the needs of widows and orphans, is a type of fasting. **Observing the Sabbath** instead of doing what we want,<sup>20</sup> is a type of fasting.

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<sup>17</sup> Isa 55:10-11 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

<sup>18</sup> Col 2:23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. ESV

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 9:27 I beat my body and make it my slave NIV

<sup>20</sup> Isa. 58:13; Jer. 17:22-24;

*Fasting is making a sacrifice* of some kind in acknowledgement that God is the source of all we have, and that he is sufficient to meet all our needs. Fasting is doing something for the glory of God that *costs* us.<sup>21</sup> The sacrifice God desires of us is a broken and contrite heart (Ps.51:17). Fasting is what leads us into such a condition. It is anything that can distance us from comfort and control, and draw us into submission to God.

**Journaling** – There is no right or wrong way to journal, but to be *transformative*, it ought to be *purposeful*. I’m going to suggest that before bible-study or prayer, we write down what we expect to get out of each. Then we do them. We open our journal afterward to record what we have discovered, or what may have happened in our conversation with God. We may find an answer to our question, or the question may raise more questions. A verse or a hymn may come to mind, or we may take up the burdens of someone we know. Write these things down.

We aren’t done yet. Write down which events, subsequent to bible-study or prayer, were related to what we studied or prayed about. How did God respond to us in the activities of our daily life? How did the things we learned from God’s word apply to how we lived that day? Are there any adjustments we intend to make so that we come into line with God’s word? Keep in mind that there may be a gap in time between our bible study or prayer, and the events which relate to them. That means we need some way of finding what we studied or prayed about. That will be addressed when we begin to practice journaling.

**Worship** – The meaning of the word “worship” in both the Old and New Testaments is to fall down before someone in submission, reverence, and humility; it is to prostrate yourself in front of someone. In conjunction with the idea of submission, it is worshipping someone as they want to be worshipped. John 4:24 “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.” Here is where we run into some disagreement over the mode of worship.

There is a rule of worship we call the *Regulative Principle*. It says that when it comes to worship, we can only do what is specified and nothing more. Unless the bible says to do it, we don’t do it. The rule is derived from the OT. Those who did something that was not specified with regard to worship died, even if their intent was not malicious.<sup>22</sup> The rule is intended to keep us from doing something displeasing to God in our worship. During the Reformation, the rule was employed to identify the super-added practices of the Roman Catholics, and to eliminate them. On occasion, this excising of worship practices has been carried to the extreme. Organs were physically ripped out of the churches with horses and ropes during the Reformation. Some churches banned musical instruments altogether, and they sing acappella to this day. What we saw was a selective application of OT law in the context of NT practices. It was arbitrary at best, and produced a number of biblically unsupportable restrictions on worship.

The converse rule of worship, which I suppose we could call the *De-Regulative Principle*, says that anything not specifically prohibited by Scripture is acceptable in the sight of God. You can

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<sup>21</sup> 2 Sam 24:24 I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." NIV

<sup>22</sup> Lev 10:1-2 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron , each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, **which He had not commanded them**. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. 2Sam 6:6-7 And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.

almost hear the advocates of this principle celebrating their freedom in Christ. Unfortunately, this has as many or more problems than the *Regulative Principle*. In the past few years, we had a number of churches accept the chaos of folks falling down in laughter, calling it an activity of the Spirit – and yet clearly violating the NT teaching that worship services are to be orderly. On the other hand, the new informal approaches that we see today make worship services less ritualistic and more like an OT celebration – we’re only missing the community-wide barbeque with the aroma of steak and cinnamon bread wafting through the gathering. The priests of the OT were a wondrous combination of butcher and chef. Maybe our seminaries ought to teach culinary arts...

There is a difference between private worship and corporate worship. Yet prostrating ourselves before God, and restricting our activities to what is commanded by him, are common to both. In worship, we are celebrating the glory of God. Everything we do is intended to acknowledge his majesty, and the attributes of his being. If we attribute something to God that does not belong to him, we violate the rule of worship. If we ignore an attribute of God that does belong to him, we violate the rule of worship. It is best to pray or sing God’s word back to him as it is recorded. This is how deep calls to deep (Ps. 42:7). Sometimes, changing the “lyrics” of the bible may not be worshipping in truth. Even so, hymn-writers have always felt free to turn biblical prose into poetry, while maintaining its truth. Stained glass artists took minor liberties with some of their portrayals. Sculptors embellished the content of many biblical passages. If we can exercise artistic license while preserving Scriptural truth, I don’t think God will be offended in the least. We do have freedom in Christ, but we mustn’t worship with complete abandon.

***Evangelism*** – The “evangel” is good news, glad tidings. It is a declaration that what was promised has been fulfilled. We are to evangelize the entire world, every man, woman, and child. Whether they have ears to hear is not our concern. We proclaim the Gospel to everyone, just as we scatter seed on every soil. Whether the soil is prepared to receive the seed is outside our control. It is the Spirit, the vinedresser, who prepares the soil.

*Giving our testimony*, which any believer can do, is slightly different than presenting the Gospel. Yet the Gospel is contained in every testimony. Testimony is witnessing to as much as we personally know. It could be simply, “I realized I was a sinner, and I could not save myself by anything I did. I believe God sent Jesus to pay the penalty for my sins on the cross, and therefore my sins are forgiven. I believe he rose from the dead, and I believe his righteousness covers me. He is my savior and my defender. Because of him, I have eternal life.” There is nothing in this that can be refuted. You cannot contest what someone believes. You can only contest the facts on which their belief rests.

*Giving the Gospel* is a declaration of facts. It is a series of propositional truths *from Scripture*. The listener can believe or disbelieve them. When the attack on the underlying facts begins, we must be ready to give a defense, a reason for the hope which is within us. This is where our study of the bible is foundational to our faith, and to our ability to evangelize effectively. Witnessing is saying what happened to us personally. Evangelizing is declaring who Jesus Christ is, and what he accomplished on the cross, as declared in the bible. New Christians, mercifully perhaps, don’t know much Scripture, and so have little to say. The idea in growing toward maturity in Christ, is that we have more to say as time goes on. But the principle of witnessing continues to restrict our speech. We never speak of anything we don’t personally know to be true. That would be hearsay.



**Discipleship** – We are to disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is not a proclamation of the gospel, or a harvesting of the field. It is reproducing Christ in the lives of believers. This is a hands-on, interactive commitment made by the *church* to every believer. It requires mentorship and time. It means exemplifying Christ to someone else. It is involving ourselves in another's life, overseeing the progression of their faith in the way that they live. It is messy, and difficult, and frustrating, and delightful, and rewarding, and obligatory. It is what the church does least, and worst.

Discipleship follows a natural progression immediately following our conversion. The first thing we learn is the Gospel. We have to learn it, because we seldom recognize it for what it is at the moment we come to Christ. We only know that we have heard the most wonderful news in our life, but we may not be able to repeat it. Repeating it, as any newborn will show, is a matter of repetition of sounds until experience fills the sounds with meaning. So the second thing, which happens alongside learning the Gospel, is repentance. It is learning to become obedient. But obedient to what? Are there any rules of conduct? What are they? And so we enter into the third thing, which is bible-study. And this happens alongside learning the Gospel, and learning to be obedient. Bible-study is hard work and not for the faint of heart. And so they sit under someone skilled in teaching what the bible says – a teacher, preacher, missionary, or fellow-believer who is further down the road than they are.

They enter into fellowship with one-another as they read and exchange, question and answer, challenge and resolve, worship and obey, and serve one another. What emerges is friendship, mutual admiration, and a celebration of Christ in whom they live and have their being. This is the lost art. Discipleship is not lecture and note-taking. It is personal, even intimate, in the sense of coming into someone's presence face-to-face. Believers enter into one another's lives. They share a kindred Spirit, a single-mindedness that the world can only marvel at... when it's done right. This is the journey we're on together in this course. We're going to rekindle a flame that has lain dormant far too long in the church. I pray you find delight in discipleship.

**Service** – What we do for Christ, we do for one another. And what we do for one another, we do for Christ. Matt 25:40 "I say to you, 'inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" We don't serve the community, whether inside or outside the Body, to gain recognition for ourselves. We do it so that God might be glorified. Matt 5:16 "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." NIV We don't work to gain points, or merit favor, with God or with men. Mark 9:35 "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." NIV As I said earlier, service is the way we personally apply what we are learning in the Bible. Its purpose is to further our fellowship with God and with each other.

If we worship without considering that we are serving God Almighty as a priest would serve at his altar in the OT, then we miss the blessing. We are all a royal priesthood (1Pet. 2:9). If we evangelize without considering that we are serving Christ as his ambassadors, then we miss the blessing (2Cor. 5:20). If we disciple without considering that we are serving our fellow believer just as Christ served his disciples at the Last Supper, then we miss the blessing (Jn. 13:12-15). Don't miss the blessing. Serve with honor and humility. Imitate Christ.