

SESSION 17

Keeping the Spiritual Fire Burning

Overview

In our last session, we looked at Jesus' words to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. These words are commonly referred to as the *Great Commission*. We answered three questions regarding the *Great Commission*: What is it? Why should I be passionate about it? How can I help fulfill it?

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will discuss how to develop intimacy (closeness) with God. We will look at, and learn from, a biblical example of one man's walk with God through difficult circumstances.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Psalm 63:1

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Where Did the Honeymoon Go?

Jim and Connie had been married for five years. In the early days of their marriage, they were very happy. Date nights each week were not uncommon, and they also shared recreational activities such as roller-blading and biking. They even found time at the end of the day to sit and talk over all that was going on in their lives.

Recently, however, job and family responsibilities had begun to encroach on their time together. Two very active children were demanding more and more of their attention. Jim's job was requiring longer hours and more

travel. Both he and Connie were exhausted at the end of the day and had little energy left for each other. They began to express frustration with each other; they felt that the spark had gone out of their relationship.

Discuss: As a friend of both Connie and Jim, what would you say to them?

How would you define the word “relationship”?

What does it take to develop and maintain a healthy relationship?

In any relationship, each party needs to initiate toward the other to bring about closeness and intimacy. Making time to be together is also an important factor. Our relationship with God is no different. God desires to have an intimate relationship with each of His children; He actively seeks our fellowship.

God's Desire

*I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with loving-kindness (Jeremiah 31:3).*

- ◆ **What does this verse communicate regarding God's love?**

- ◆ **What does it mean to you that God desires a relationship with you?**

Our Response

In light of God's desire **for** us, there should be a response **from** us. Just as daily activities often crowd out our time with the people we love, they can also crowd out our time with the Lord.

David was called “a man after God's own heart” not because he was perfect, but because he had a heart-to-heart relationship with God. Psalm 63 gives us a vivid picture of David's deep, personal walk with God. It was characterized by a seeking, thirsting, responsive spirit. It is likely that David wrote this Psalm during Absalom's conspiracy against him. His life in danger, David fled to the desert to escape from his own son.

How did David respond to God? Read Psalm 63:1-8.

How did David describe the depth of his desire for God? v. 1

What did David experience as a result of passionately seeking God (vs. 2-8)?

David recognized that experiencing the love of God was better than life itself and resulted in a deep sense of joy and fulfillment.

What about our response?

What does it mean to thirst for God?

Why did David thirst?

What are you thirsty for?

What satisfied David?

Are you satisfied?

Did David have his life totally in order?

There are people who think they are dying to self by all their activities for God but, in fact, they are just killing themselves.

--Henry Cloud

David's satisfaction was not based on religious activity performed out of obligation. It came from his relationship with God. He understood that only God could give him what he needed.

Application

There is no magic formula for developing intimacy with God. It is important to remember, however, that time together is essential for the health of any relationship. Below are some ideas to help refresh your times with God.

Feel free to be creative!

1. Look at your schedule for this week. Plan daily times with God.
 - ◆ Read and meditate on God's Word.
 - ◆ Praise God by listening to and/or singing along with a worship CD or tape.
 - ◆ Talk with God.
 - ◆ Pray through a passage of scripture.
 - ◆ Memorize a Scripture passage.
 - ◆ Write your thoughts, responses, ideas, and reflections in a journal.
2. Do something unique for one of your times with God this week.
 - ◆ Go on a prayer walk.
 - ◆ Block out an extended time with God (e.g. 2-4 hours).
 - ◆ Do an in-depth study of a Scripture passage.
 - ◆ Meet with a friend or family member to read and pray together.
3. Get together with a more mature Christian to find out how he or she develops his or her relationship with God.
4. Read Psalm 63. Meditate on it. Ask God to make you more and more a man or woman after God's own heart.

SESSION 18

Discerning God's Will

Overview

In our last session, we discussed how to develop intimacy (closeness) with God. We looked at, and learned from, a biblical example of one man's walk with God through difficult circumstances.

REAL FAITH

In this session we will look at how to discover God's will for the decisions of life. In *Part 1*, we will look at why it is important to seek God's direction, and we will see that God truly has our best interests in mind at all times. We will also look at misunderstandings people have concerning God's will, and we will discuss where believers are to turn in order to determine His will. In *Part 2*, we will learn a method of pursuing God's will, the *sound mind principle*, and we will apply it to a current decision.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Jeremiah 29:11

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

- 2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*
Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*
Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*
Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*
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DISCERNING GOD'S WILL: PART 1

What Should She Do?

Dominique had been in her current management position for three years. There were several aspects of her job she liked: the travel, leading a team of people, and having her evenings and weekends available for church involvement and volunteer work. However there were a few things with which she was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Even though she

enjoyed visiting the other cities in her region, spending a lot of time in airports and hotels started bothering her. In addition, her company had recently begun asking her to be involved in activities that bordered on being unethical.

As a result of her job dissatisfaction, Dominique began to circulate her resume. Over a period of two months, she received three job offers. Each of the positions, like her current one, had positives and negatives. Even though she wanted to get out of her current position, Dominique wondered if any of the three offers would be better. Her relationship with God was important to her. What did He want her to do?

Discuss: What kind of direction would you give to Dominique?

In considering the decisions of life, many Christians, like Dominique, wrestle with the question, “What is God’s will?” Whether it is the choice of a friendship, a career, a mate, a purchase, or how to make the most of our time, it is important for believers to understand what the Bible says about how to make decisions that are in alignment with God’s purposes.

Why Is God’s Will Important?

1. God created us to know Him and fulfill His purposes.

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul wrote:

Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for Christians everywhere, I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. (Ephesians 1:15-17, NLT)

God’s will is not just something you do, but rather, it is a relationship with Jesus.

Paul prayed for growth in the Ephesians’ spiritual wisdom and understanding because He knew that they were created to know God.

2. God's will is always the very best for us.

What words and phrases in the following passages indicate that God always has our best interests in mind?

- Romans 12:2
- Jeremiah 29:11
- Romans 8:28
- John 15:5, 8, 11
- Romans 3:3

FOUR THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1. God is sovereign. He is in control of everything and everything He does is right.

2. God loves you perfectly. He will never harm you; therefore, you can trust Him with your life. You can follow His lead **by faith**, knowing that He has your best interests in mind.

3. God is concerned with the process you go through in becoming like Him, not just the “product” you can accomplish with your life.

4. God's will is not elusive. He desires to reveal His will more than you desire to know it.

Discuss: Why do people sometimes fear knowing God's will?

How could the above truths help alleviate fear?

Misunderstandings about God's Will

Many well-meaning Christians rely on methods of determining God's will which are not based on faith in God and His word.

1. The “Open Door” Policy: Take the first option to present itself.

This approach goes something like this:

I needed to buy a car, so I prayed about it, asking God to lead me in the decision. Shortly after I finished praying, a friend called to see if I wanted to buy his car. It must be God's will because my friend called right after I prayed. (Never mind that the car was on its last leg, and his friend had been trying to sell it for several months.)

People with high closure needs have a tendency to go down this path. While the first option is sometimes the best one, wisdom usually includes pursuing more than one option.

2. The “Closed Door” Policy: A closed door means it is not God’s will.

In this approach, one assumes that if there is initial resistance to an option, it must not be the option God wants. The misunderstanding here is that God’s will is always the path of least resistance. The Bible is clear, however, that God frequently allows difficulty in our lives in order to develop our character and cause us to depend on Him. (See Romans 5:3-5.) Sometimes God wants us to persevere, even when we run into an initial closed door. (See 1 Thessalonians 2:2.)

3. The “Dramatic Experience” Policy: Seeking a dramatic experience to determine God’s will.

Though God sometimes works very dramatically to reveal His will, this is the exception rather than the rule. Throughout the Bible we see God revealing His will in supernatural ways (e.g. the burning bush in Exodus 3:2 or the miracles of Jesus in the gospels). More often, however, His will is spelled out plainly through directives and commands (e.g. “Honor your father and mother” in Deuteronomy 5:16 or “Make disciples of all nations” in Matthew 28:18-20).

Why do we sometimes want God to show His will in dramatic ways?

Where to Turn to Discern God’s Will

Where should believers look for direction?

1. The Bible

God’s written word is our **ultimate source of authority** in all areas of life. God has already given clear direction in the Bible for most of the decisions we face. For example, if a believer is considering getting married to someone who is not a Christian, the Bible clearly states, “Do not team up with those who are unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14). No further insight or direction is needed. God has communicated, “Do not do it!” very clearly in Scripture.

2. Prayer.

What do the following passages say about the importance of prayer in seeking God’s will?

- ◆ James 1:5-8
- ◆ Philippians 4:6-7

NOTE: Each of the remaining means of discerning God's will must be tested against the direction of God's written Word. **If circumstances, input from others, our own desires, or inner impressions are contradictory to the Bible, the Bible wins out every time.**

3. Impressions from the Holy Spirit

Read Philippians 2:12-13 and Acts 16:6-10. How does the Holy Spirit give direction to believers?

4. Input from mature believers

It is often very helpful to get counsel from other believers you respect and trust. They may have biblical input, perspectives, and additional information that you have missed.

What do the following passages say about the value of input from others?

- ◆ Proverbs 19:20
- ◆ Proverbs 27:17

5. Providential circumstances . . . seeing God at work

Frequently God uses circumstances to **confirm** a decision we have already made by faith.

6. Our own desires

The longer we follow Christ and submit to His leadership, the more our own heart desires will align with His purposes. People sometimes possess the following mistaken mindset:

It can't be God's will if it's something I want or something I would enjoy.

King David wrote in Psalm 37:4, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires" (NLT). The more we pursue intimacy with God, the more we will desire the same things He desires.

I don't doubt that the Holy Spirit guides your decisions from within when you make them with the intention of pleasing God. The error would be to think that He speaks only within, whereas in reality He speaks also through Scripture, the Church, Christian friends, books, etc.

-- C.S. Lewis

DISCERNING GOD'S WILL: PART 2

How Do We Discern God's Will?

1. Be willing to obey God.

We should not ask God to reveal His will and then decide after He reveals it whether or not we will obey it. If we take this approach, we will miss out on God's best for us. In addition, we should not seek His will in one area of life unless we are committed to do His will in every area of life.

Read Romans 12:1-8 and Romans 13:1-5. As you read, answer the following questions:

- ◆ To whom do we belong (12:1)?
- ◆ Do our decisions affect only us (12:3-8)?
- ◆ To whom are we to submit (13:1-2)?
- ◆ Why is it important to submit to the authorities God has placed in our lives (13:3-5)?

2. Make your decisions according to the *sound mind principle*.

◆ The *sound mind principle* defined

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (NLT). The term *self-discipline* is also translated *sound mind* (KJV). *Self-discipline* in this context means "the power to make godly choices in the face of other alternatives." Therefore, having a *sound mind* means that our thought processes are being changed for the better (Romans 12:2) and are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The *sound mind principle* is different from, and superior to, common sense. Common sense relies upon only self to make a decision. It depends on human wisdom, which can lead us away from God's best for us because it is often based on self-interest, emotions, and chance circumstances.

Believers with a *sound mind* possess the mind of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:15-16 the Apostle Paul wrote, "We who have the Spirit understand these things, but others can't understand us at all. How could they? For, 'Who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who can give him counsel?' But we can understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ." (NLT)

Since the Holy Spirit lives in us, we can be directed by the Spirit and thus receive wisdom and guidance from God.

◆ **Using the *sound mind principle***

1. Pray for wisdom. (Review James 1:5-6.)
2. Be sure you are empowered by the Holy Spirit. (Review Ephesians 5:18.)
3. Make an initial list of options with their known positives and negatives.
4. List any missing information to be pursued or questions to be answered.
5. Collect all available information and the counsel of mature Christians on each option. (There may be some waiting involved in this step; do not be afraid to wait!)
6. Review these key questions:

What was Jesus' purpose for coming to earth (Luke 19:10)?

What is the most important thing that has happened in your life?

What is the most important thing you can do for someone else?

In light of the above questions, which option will best maximize my ability to help fulfill Christ's Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)?

7. Trust God for His wisdom, evaluate the options, and make a decision to move or to wait according to His promises.

The steps of the godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand (Psalm 37:23-24, NLT).

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6, NLT).

8. Do not depend on your feelings.

God promises wisdom, **not the feeling of wisdom**. Our tendency may be to look for a sense or feeling of "rightness" about the decision. However, sometimes the options are so similar that there will not be any clear choice. In those cases we simply need to make a decision and trust that God has guided us.

9. Take steps to follow through on your decision by faith. As you follow through, look for God to give you confirmation of the decision you have made.

Application

Use the steps above as you consider a decision you are currently facing. Some people like to think through their decision on paper. One way to do this is to use a grid something like the one below. This example is someone's evaluation of three job offers in different cities. He has listed several factors in the left column, given a value to each factor (How important is this factor to my relationship with God and my influence for Him?) and then rated each option.

FACTOR	VALUE IN REL. W/ GOD 1 = LOW 5 = HIGH	OPTION 1: Detroit		OPTION 2: Orlando		OPTION 3: L.A.	
		Option Rating 1 = low 5 = high	Value x Option	Option Rating 1 = low 5 = high	Value x Option	Option Rating 1 = low 5 = high	Value x Option
Good Location?	1	x 5	= 5	x 3	= 3	x 2	= 2
Good job fit?	4	x 4	= 16	x 4	= 16	x 3	= 12
Healthy Relationships?	4	x 2	= 8	x 2	= 8	x 2	= 8
Cost of Living?	3	x 2	= 6	x 2	= 6	x 1	= 3
Good place for spouse?	5	x 2	= 10	x 4	= 20	x 2	= 10
Good place for kids?	5	x 2	= 10	x 4	= 20	x 1	= 5
Good church available?	5	x 2	= 10	x 3	= 15	x 5	= 25
Opportunities for ministry?	4	x 3	= 12	x 3	= 12	x 5	= 20
TOTALS			77		100		85

Another way of evaluating the choices is to list the positives and negatives of each option.

OPTION 1:		OPTION 2:		OPTION 3:	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative

Whether you write your thoughts on paper or not, take some time to prayerfully work through your decision using the sound mind principle. You can be assured that God will guide your decision as you seek His direction.

SESSION 19

Developing Your Personal Ministry Strategy

Overview

In our last session, we looked at how to discover God's will for the decisions of life. We first looked at why it is important to seek God's direction, and we saw that God truly has our best interests in mind at all times. Second, we looked at misunderstandings people have concerning God's will. Then, we discussed where believers are to turn in order to determine God's will. Finally, we learned a method of pursuing God's will, the *sound mind principle*, and we applied it to a current decision.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will look at developing a personal ministry strategy. First we will look at the main components of Jesus' ministry strategy. Then we will look at the components of our own strategy and how we can prepare ourselves to carry them out. Finally, we will plan out some specifics for being involved in evangelizing, discipling, and mobilizing on an ongoing basis.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Luke 19:10

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

The Activity Trap

Austin had been attending Walnut Hills Community Church for a year. He loved the worship, the messages, the small groups, the outreach, and all the other ways he could get involved. It seemed that every weekend he was signing up for something new. Austin was also a very responsible person, so he worked faithfully at each of his responsibilities. He developed a reputation for being someone who could always be depended upon and called upon.

At first Austin was energized by all the activity. Over time, however, his enthusiasm began to disappear. He began to have feelings of resentment toward the people who asked him to volunteer. Austin also started to wonder what impact all of his activity was having on the lives of others. Was he really touching anyone deeply or developing anyone else to lead?

Discuss: What kind of input would you give Austin?

There are lots of ministries in which Christians can be involved. Though most of these are good activities, there is often no overall purpose or direction to them. Let's take a look at the ministry of Jesus to learn more about how He strategically used His three years of ministry on planet Earth.

Jesus' Ministry Strategy

1. Jesus had an overall objective in mind (His *Mission*).

Read Luke 19:10. What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth?

Read Luke 24:46-47. To what extent was His message to be proclaimed?

2. Jesus ministered to the masses (*Evangelizing*), yet spent focused time making disciples (*Discipling*).

Read Luke 6:17-19. Jesus ministered to multitudes of people. Why do you think Jesus spent time ministering to large groups?

Read Luke 9:28. Jesus often spent focused time with His closest disciples. Why do you think Jesus spent focused time with a specific few?

3. Jesus called people like you and me to reach the world (*Mobilizing*).

Read Acts 4:13. How does it make you feel to know that God uses ordinary people to help reach the world?

4. Jesus calls men and women to count the cost of embracing His strategy.

As you read the following passages, write down key words and phrases which express the cost of being a disciple, or follower, of Christ.

Luke 9:23-25

Luke 14:25-33

Reflect: What are some of the potential costs to me of involvement with Jesus' ministry strategy?

Jesus called all believers to help give every person in the world the opportunity to know Him. In order to insure that everyone would get that opportunity, Jesus ministered to the masses, and He spent focused time discipling a highly committed few. If we are going to help reach the world for Christ, we need to model our own strategies after His.

Your Ministry Strategy: the Big Picture

There were three basic strategy areas to Jesus' ministry. Each ministry area was undergirded with talking and listening to His Father. As you develop your personal ministry strategy, ask God to lead you at some level in each of the following:

1. Evangelizing (Win)

Helping bring people into a relationship with God is at the core of the Great Commission. (Read Acts 1:8.) Making disciples begins with introducing people to Christ. This involves demonstrating God's love in practical ways as well as explaining clearly the message of salvation in written or verbal form.

2. Discipling (Build)

Once a person begins a relationship with God, it is essential for him or her to learn the basics of following Christ. In addition, many people who have been believers for years have never had the opportunity to be discipled. Both new and long-time Christians need to be built up so that they can win and build disciples. (Read Colossians 1:28-29.)

3. Mobilizing (Send)

The nature of Christ's message is that it must be passed on to others, both to those in our own culture and also to those in every cultural/language group in the world. As people are won to Christ and built up in their faith, there will be an internal motivation to win and build others. Some will respond to this internal motivation quickly. Others will need more time, patience, and nurturing. Regardless of personality and giftedness, every believer can be equipped to reach and disciple others.
(Read 2 Timothy 2:2.)

Discuss: In which of the above ministry areas do you feel most confident? In which do you need the most equipping?

Your Ministry Strategy: Personal Preparation

1. Prepare your heart for reaching lost people.

As you read the following passages, jot down key words and phrases which describe . . .

◆ The lost person's condition

1 Corinthians 2:14

Romans 3:10-18

Romans 3:23

◆ The lost person's outcome

Hebrews 9:27

Revelation 20:11-15

Romans 6:23a

Matthew 13:40-42

◆ The believer's responsibility regarding lost people

Mark 1:17

Proverbs 11:30

2 Corinthians 5:20

Colossians 1:28-29

*All of humanity
stands in need of
Jesus so that we
may not remain
obstinate sinners to
the end and be
condemned.*

-- Clement of
Alexandria

Discuss: Which of the above Bible passages has the greatest impact on you? Why?

Why is heart preparation necessary for believers who want to reach lost people?

- ◆ Now take a look at Ezekiel 33:1-6. As you read, answer the following question:

Do you see yourself as a watchman whose solemn responsibility it is to warn people of the coming judgement?

(NOTE: We are literally to warn people in a loving, yet truthful way that eternal danger is coming. Without Christ, they face an eternal, terrifying separation from God. We are not judging people as we do this. We are simply warning them of what happens to those who reject God's offer.)

2. Access your God-given resources.

Acts 1:8 The Holy Spirit empowers us to influence people for Christ.

Luke 12:12 The Holy Spirit gives us the right words to say.

John 16:8 The Holy Spirit convicts seekers of sin and of their need for Christ

Discuss: When have you sought to minister to others while relying only on your own resources? What was the outcome?

When have you relied on God's resources for ministry even when you felt that your own resources were expended? What was the outcome?

Your Ministry Strategy: Thinking It Through

Identify your personal spheres of influence.

1. **Evangelizing:** With whom do you come in contact regularly who may not yet know Christ? Add these to your *Prayer-Care-Share Card*. (See Session 12.)
2. **Discipling:** What new or young believer(s) do you know whom you could potentially begin discipling in a one-to-one context?

3. **Mobilizing:** What mature believers do you know whom you could train in one-to-one discipling, and who could fairly quickly begin evangelizing and discipling others?

Application

- ◆ Begin praying for the people you have listed above.
- ◆ Make it a priority to be involved in all three areas of ministry (evangelizing, discipling, and mobilizing) by doing the following:

- Write down a simple, do-able goal in each ministry area. An example might be:

1. Evangelizing- pray regularly for those on my *Prayer-Care-Share Card*
- initiate toward one pre-Christian per week.
This may involve taking him to lunch, listening to him, telling my story, giving him a *JESUS* video or a copy of *The Four Spiritual Laws*.

2. Discipling - take one new Christian per year through the *Faith, exploring your relationship with God* follow-up series, or another basic follow-up study.

3. Mobilizing - take one mature Christian per year through the *Real Faith* discipleship series.

- Your personal ministry strategy goals:

1. Evangelizing -

2. Discipling -

3. Mobilizing -

- Schedule time for these activities.

Enlist the help of your disciple-trainer or another Christian friend. Have him or her check with you regularly to encourage you and assist you with implementing your plan.

SESSION 20

Helping New Christians Get Started

Overview

In our last session, we looked at developing a personal ministry strategy. First we looked at the main components of Jesus' ministry strategy. Then we looked at the components of our own strategy and how we could prepare ourselves to carry them out. Finally, we planned out some specifics for being involved in evangelizing, discipling, and mobilizing on an ongoing basis.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will look at what God desires for new believers. Then we will consider what the Bible says about God's part in their growth process. Finally, we will look at some tools that can be used to help the new Christian.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Colossians 1:28-29

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

How Did You Get Started?

Reflect: **Think back on the early stages of your relationship with Christ. What people and activities were most helpful to you?**

If you could change anything about the early stages of your walk with Christ, what would you change? Why?

God's Desire for New Christians

There are two basic objectives for new believers:

1. Help them grow to maturity in Christ.

Read Colossians 1:28-2:3. What were the Apostle Paul's main objectives with the believers of the church in Colossae?

What are some signs of maturity in a believer's life? (e.g. in attitudes, family relationships, biblical understanding, work relationships, influence of others, etc.)

2. Equip them to become multiplying disciples.

Read 2 Timothy 2:2. The believer's goal is not just to add more people to God's family (*spiritual addition*). We want to make disciples who will make disciples who will in turn make more disciples (*spiritual multiplication*).

Discuss: What are some of the roadblocks which could prevent new believers from becoming multiplying disciples?

God's Part in the Growth of New Christians

In order to begin thinking about how to help new Christians grow, it is important to understand God's part and our part in the process. Let's begin by looking at God's part.

1. God is sovereign in the new believer's growth.

God's sovereignty has been defined as His absolute control over the universe. If God is ultimately in control of everything in the universe (Psalm 103:19), then He is in control of the growth of believers. As a result, it is important to keep in mind the following principles as we help new believers in their journey:

- ◆ Only God can produce growth.

As you read the following passages, jot down key words and phrases which describe God's work in the life of believers.

Philippians 1:6

Philippians 2:13

- ◆ God uses several means to produce growth.

God works through His Word, His church, prayer, circumstances, and other people to help believers grow in their relationship with Him. In addition, each believer's growth process is unique. God has an individually designed path for each Christian to walk. (See Ephesians 2:10.)

***Discuss:* How would an understanding of God's sovereignty be helpful for believers as they help new Christians get started?**

2. God allows each person to respond to His Word.

Read Mark 4:3-9, 14-20. As you read, note the following responses people have to God's word.

- ◆ Some do not accept His word at all (4:15).
- ◆ Some receive the Word with joy at the start, but when problems come, they quickly fall away and lose interest (4:16-17).
- ◆ Some hear and respond to the message, but later they allow it to be choked out by the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things (4:18-19).
- ◆ Some hear and accept God's Word and produce an abundant crop (4:20).

***Discuss:* What are the similarities of, and differences between, the four people in the above parable?**

How would understanding the above parable help your outlook when a new believer seems indifferent about growing?

How would understanding the above parable keep you from becoming prideful about "success" in ministry? (See 1 Corinthians 3:7.)

Your Part in Helping New Christians

1. Believers are co-workers with one another and with God.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. As you read, answer the following questions:

What role did Paul and Apollos play in the growth of these believers (3:5)?

What two agricultural roles are mentioned (3:6)? Who actually caused these believers to grow (3:6)?

What is the basis for rewards for the workers (3:8)?

2. Believers are gardeners . . . planting, tending, watering, nurturing.

Reread 1 Corinthians 3:6.

What kinds of “gardening activities” from others helped you in your growth?

What can you do to help create a healthy growing environment for a new believer?

Tools for Helping New Christians

◆ A One-to-One Relationship

Again and again in this discipleship process, we have stressed the importance of helping believers become built up in their faith. One of the most effective means for helping new believers grow is through a one-to-one discipling relationship with a more mature believer.

◆ A Transferable Method

Because our objective is not only to help new believers grow, but also to equip them to help others, it is important to use a tool that is transferable. One such tool that is specifically designed for new Christians is the four-session *Your Life in Christ* series. In addition, there are other similar tools available through Campus Crusade for Christ.

◆ Other Tools

Here are some other vital components of new believer follow-up:

1. **Pray for the new Christian.** The Apostle Paul prayed regularly for those he had led to Christ and disciplined.

Read Philippians 1:3-6. Write out in your own words what Paul prayed for the Philippian Christians.

What specific things could you pray for a new believer?

2. **Focus on God's Word.**

Read Romans 10:17. According to this passage, how does a person's faith grow?

Why is it important to answer new believers' questions by turning to God's Word?

3. **Help them establish relationships with other Christians.** (Read Hebrews 10:25.)
4. **Encourage them to tell others what God has done in their lives.**
5. **Teach them to rely on the Spirit's power.**

Application

Look over the above list of "Tools for helping new Christians."

1. With which tools do you have the greatest confidence and experience?
2. With which do you need the most work?
3. Ask God to show you whom you could take through the four follow-up lessons.

SESSION 21

The Attributes of God

Overview

In our last session, we learned how to help a new Christian get started in his or her relationship with God. First we covered what the Bible says about God's part and our part in the new believer's growth process. Then we looked at the tools that are needed to help the new Christian grow.

REAL FAITH

Today we will be looking at God's attributes--His distinguishing characteristics. It should become evident that because of His attributes, we can trust, serve, obey, and love Him more and more each day.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Romans 11:33

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Introduction

Bill has been waiting for two months to see if he is going to get a promotion. His boss is considering him and a co-worker for the position. Bill has been extremely anxious. He has a hard time sleeping at night, he is on edge with his family, and he has been much less patient with everyone at work. He feels that he deserves the promotion, but it's really out of his control.

Over breakfast he tells his friend Neil what's been going on. Neil listens patiently, then finally asks, "Bill, how do you think God feels about your promotion?"

Discuss: How might a more clear understanding of the character of God help Bill in his situation?

In His book The Knowledge of the Holy, A.W. Tozer wrote:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.

A.W.Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, Harper & Row, 1961, p. 9.

To answer the question, "What is God like?," we must first say that God is not exactly like anyone or anything. He is the infinite Creator of the universe, and we are His finite, imperfect creatures. It would be foolish for a created being to think that he could completely understand his Creator. Fortunately for us, our Creator is a relational God and He desires not only to know us, but also to be known by us. As a result, He has revealed to us His character or His attributes through His creation, through the person of Christ, and through His written Word, the Bible.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

--A.W. Tozer

In this session we will look at several Bible passages to learn more about what God is like. Obviously, since God is infinite, any study of His attributes will be limited. However, God does promise that those who seek Him will find Him (Proverbs 8:17). As we look into His Word to find out more about what He is like, God promises to reveal Himself to us.

God's Attributes

1. God is Unchanging (Immutable). God is unchanging and unchangeable. He never changes in His attributes or in His relationship to His creation. He is always true to His Word and His nature. Even though your circumstances or relationships with people may change, God will never change. Read James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8; and 2 Timothy 2:13.

What words do you see in these passages that describe God's immutability?

How do you respond to change in your life? How would thinking on God's immutability help you deal with change?

2. **God is Patient.** God demonstrates His patience toward believers and non-believers. Psalm 103:8 indicates that He is "slow to anger" in His relationship with His followers. The Bible is also clear that God is being patient toward those who don't yet know Christ because He wants to give everyone the opportunity to come into a relationship with Him (2 Peter 3:9). Read Psalm 103:8-14 & 2 Peter 3:9.

What words or phrases in these passages indicate that God is patient?

In what life situations are you tempted to be impatient?

How does it make you feel knowing that God is patient with you?

How would a greater understanding of God's patience enable you to be patient with yourself, with others, and with your circumstances?

3. **God is Just.** God is completely fair, impartial, honest, and ethical. Those who do evil will ultimately get what they deserve. When you are wronged, you do not have to take revenge because God is your defender and avenger. Read Psalm 11:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-6; Romans 2:16, 19; and Deuteronomy 32:35.

What do these verses say about God's justice?

Think of a situation in which you were hurt or offended by someone. Also think of a situation where you wronged someone else. How would an understanding of God's justice help you respond in these situations?

4. **God is Truth.** God is completely consistent with Himself. He is ultimate truth, fact, and reality. He has revealed Himself as He truly is and His revelations are completely reliable. Read Numbers 23:19; Isaiah 45:19; and John 14:6.

Why do human beings lie or shade the truth?

Where do you see the tendency to lie or shade the truth in the world around you?

How are you tempted to lie or shade the truth?

How would a greater understanding of God's truth affect your choice of words?

5. **God is Sovereign.** The word "sovereign" means "supreme ruler, superior to all others." When we say that God is sovereign, we mean that He is the supreme ruler over the entire universe. Ultimately He is in complete control of everything that happens. Read Psalm 103:19 & 135:5-6.

How would you answer if someone were to ask you, "What does the Bible mean when it says that God is sovereign?"

In what situations are people most likely to doubt God's sovereignty?

Think of a circumstance in which you find it difficult to trust God. How would a greater understanding of God's sovereignty enable you to express trust in this situation?

6. **God is All-Knowing (Omniscient).** God knows all actual and possible things. Nothing ever takes Him by surprise. He has known exactly what would happen through all of time, even before time began. Even though you do not know the future, God knows all about your entire life. God knows all your thoughts and the intentions of your heart. Read Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20b.

God knows everything about us, and He loves us anyway. How does understanding this truth make you feel?

God knows our future and He has our best interests in mind (Jeremiah 29:11). Do you ever fear the future? How might thinking about God's omniscience enable you to handle "future fear?"

*Were there even
one datum of
knowledge,
however small,
unknown to God,
His rule would
break down at that
point.*

--A.W. Tozer

- 7. God is Present Everywhere (Omnipresent).** God is not in everything (i.e. pantheism). Rather, God is everywhere present at all times. He sees, knows, and understands everything that is happening at all times. Read Psalms 139:7-12; Proverbs 15:3.

How do these passages describe God's omnipresence?

Think of a time when you felt alone or isolated. How would a deeper understanding of God's omnipresence have helped you deal with the loneliness?

Application

What is the greatest challenge you face right now?

What need in your life do you have difficulty believing that God will meet?

What one or two attributes of God covered in this session relate most directly to this challenge or need?

Go back and read again the scriptures listed under these specific attributes. As you read, ask God to give you insight about Him and how He wants to work in you as you face this challenge or need. Summarize your insights below in two or three sentences or write your thoughts to God in your journal.

For Further Study of God's Attributes

In this session we have looked at just seven of God's attributes. Below are listed six more attributes along with corresponding Bible passages. (There are many more passages to turn to for studying each attribute. Those listed below are just a sampling to get you started.) If you would like to do further study, look up the passages listed under each attribute and jot down notes in the space provided.

Eternal (Isaiah 44:6; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 1:8)

God has always existed from eternity past and will exist on into eternity future. He has no beginning or end. No one or no thing proceed God. God is not bound by time and He knows the future.

Faithful (Deuteronomy 7:9; Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Corinthians 1:9)

You can trust God. He will always keep His promises. He is dependable. He will comfort, protect, guide, and deliver you.

All Powerful (Ephesians 3:20; Psalm 147:5; Job 42:2)

God's power is mighty. His power is greater than all. He is self-sufficient. His power and ability are immeasurable and unlimited. God can do all things.

Loving (Isaiah 43:4; Jeremiah 31:3; 1 John 4:16)

God is compassionate and tender toward you. He is merciful. He withholds that which you deserve. He longs to care for and be kind to you with perfect goodness. Love is the very nature of God. Because God loves you with an everlasting love, as His child, you never have to earn or maintain His love.

Good (Psalm 34:8; Psalm 84:11; 1 Peter 2:3)

God never stops being good to His children. His goodness to you is demonstrated in His love, mercy, and grace.

Righteous (Ezra 9:15; Isaiah 45:20-25; Isaiah 41:10)

God is just, right, correct, and lawful. God is chaste, moral, blameless, pure, and virtuous. God is perfect in all of these. He is your righteous Savior.

Spiritual Multiplication

Overview

In our last session, we learned about God's attributes--His distinguishing characteristics. First, we looked at several Bible passages which reveal some of God's attributes. Then, we thought through how God's attributes apply to our own lives and relationships.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will cover “spiritual multiplication.” First we will define it, then we will look at the biblical pattern for it found in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Finally, we will cover the mindset and motivation that is necessary for us to multiply spiritually.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 2:2

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

So Many Opportunities, So Little Time

Kendra, age 32, was making a significant impact on the lives of some women at her church. Not only did she lead a women’s small group, but she had also started meeting individually with two women who wanted to be discipled. Over time, however, word spread about the opportunity for one-to-one discipleship, and Kendra found herself meeting with six women on a weekly basis.

In addition, there were another five women who told her that they, too, wanted to be discipled. Even though she enjoyed building into these

women, Kendra began to feel overwhelmed. There were so many who wanted to be disciplined. She just didn't have enough time to get to them all!

Discuss: What kind of feedback would you offer Kendra?

Spiritual Multiplication Defined

Spiritual multiplication has been defined as winning people to Christ and building them in their faith in order that they will be able to reach and build others, spiritual generation after spiritual generation. When you introduce someone to Christ, you have done *spiritual addition*. When you disciple this new believer and equip him or her to reach and disciple others who will reach and disciple still others, you have done *spiritual multiplication*.

If you were to do *spiritual addition*, bringing ten people per year to faith in Christ for the next ten years, you would have added 100 new people to the church. If you were to do *spiritual multiplication* for the next ten years--discipling one person per year who was equipped to reach and disciple one other person who would reach and disciple another (etc.)--you would have raised up over 1,000 trained workers for the body of Christ in that period of time.

In order to strengthen our convictions regarding the critical nature of spiritual multiplication, let's look at a biblical example. Open your Bible to 2 Timothy 2:1-10 and read the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, a young leader he had disciplined.

There are four practical questions which are answered by Paul's words in this passage. Let's take a closer look at the passage in order to answer each question.

Where Do We Find the Strength to Multiply Spiritually?

Read 2 Timothy 2:1.

Discuss: What was to be Timothy's source of strength for spiritual multiplication?

What other sources of strength may Timothy have been tempted to trust?

How might you be tempted to depend upon your own gifts and abilities as you disciple others?

Is There a Biblical Pattern for Spiritual Multiplication?

Read 2 Timothy 2:2. As you read, note the following principles for those who seek to spiritually multiply.

1. They need to be taught.

Paul used the phrase “the things you have heard me say.” Paul was intentional in teaching Timothy what he needed to know about following Christ and influencing others for Him. This implies also that Timothy assumed the role of a learner. Paul expected Timothy to pass on to others a specific body of knowledge: “the things you have heard me say.”

***Discuss:* Why is a teachable attitude important for those who wish to spiritually multiply?**

2. They have something of great value to pass on to others.

Timothy was to *entrust* the things he had learned to faithful men. We entrust only things of great value, such as treasure or valuable belongings. We do not *entrust* worthless things to the care of others. The things Paul taught Timothy (God’s life-changing truths) were of great worth. These truths were meant to be passed on to faithful people who would pass them on to others.

***Discuss:* What things are of greatest value to you personally?**

Why are these things valuable to you?

What keeps you from seeing your relationship with God as a prized possession?

3. They are to entrust God’s truths to reliable people who are able to teach others.

◆ **Reliable people**

We entrust things of value only to reliable, trustworthy people who will treat what we have entrusted with appropriate care. Even though disciples of Jesus are to help share the gospel with everyone, they are to prioritize spending focused time and energy with reliable disciples.

Discuss: Why is it important to spend time with reliable disciples?

What are some characteristics of reliable people?

◆ **Able (qualified) people**

Discuss: What is the difference between being *reliable* and being *able*?

Is it possible to be reliable, yet not able?

◆ **People who will teach others**

These reliable, able disciples are to pass on what they learn to other reliable, able disciples. It is not enough to be reliable and able. Those who want to multiply spiritually must begin to intentionally invest time discipling others.

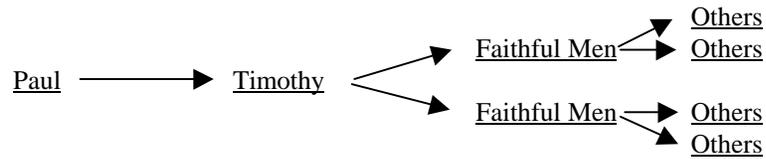
The following chart illustrates Paul's ministry of spiritual multiplication. For Paul to make disciples, he needs to work only with Timothy. For Paul to make multiplying disciples, Timothy must have disciples who make other disciples. In some ways, what Timothy did with what he learned was out of Paul's control. Paul could not force Timothy to multiply spiritually. This is why the selection process is critical.

Activity is no substitute for production. Production is no substitute for reproduction.

--Dawson Trotman,
Founder of The Navigators

Paul chose to build into Timothy because he saw that Timothy not only **desired to grow** in his relationship with God, but that he was also **willing** and **able** to pass on what he had learned to others. Does this mean that we never spend time with those who do not multiply? Certainly not! It does mean, however, that we are always

looking for faithful people and are regularly encouraging believers to be reliable and able.



What Kind of Mindset Is Necessary in Order to Spiritually Multiply?

Paul refers to three people—the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer—to illustrate the kind of perspective and commitment necessary to be a spiritual multiplier.

Read 2 Timothy 2:3-7. What principles of spiritual multiplication do you learn from . . .

. . . the soldier?

. . . the athlete?

. . . the farmer?

The person who makes a success of living is the one who sees his goal steadily and aims for it unswervingly.

-- Cecil B. DeMille

Let's take a closer look at each person.

1. The soldier (v. 3-4)

- ◆ A good soldier is single-minded in purpose. He says “no” to good things in order to please and follow his commanding officer.
- ◆ A good soldier is willing to suffer hardship.

Discuss: What are some good things you may have to say “no” to in order to spiritually multiply?

What potential hardships might be encountered by someone who commits to spiritual multiplication?

2. The athlete (v.5)

- ◆ The victorious athlete is disciplined. He knows that what lies behind every victory is hours of rigorous training and discipline.
- ◆ The victorious athlete follows the rules of the contest.

Discuss: What disciplines and training are necessary in order to disciple others who will disciple others?

3. The farmer (v. 6)

- ◆ The farmer works hard. There are months of labor prior to the harvest. There are emotional ups and downs coinciding with unpredictable weather conditions. There are great joys. Sometimes there is great disappointment.
- ◆ The farmer enjoys a fruitful harvest. His patience and hard work are rewarded when the harvest is brought in.

Discuss: Describe the hard work, labor, joy, and disappointment associated with discipling others.

How Can I Be Passionate about Spiritual Multiplication?

Read 2 Timothy 2:8-10. As you read, write out below any principles which can help you in your passion and motivation for spiritual multiplication.

2:8

2:9

2:10

Discuss: Why is passion for spiritual multiplication important?

Have you ever worked with someone who is “passion less?” How did their lack of passion affect your effectiveness and motivation?

Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Is it worth it to pour out our lives (our time, energy, talent, and finances) for the gospel? Why or why not?

In recent years, western cultural analysts have noted that though great numbers of people are professing to be Christian, the lives of these believers have not been impacted in a significant way. Western Christians have become increasingly focused on personal peace and affluence and have forgotten God’s agenda on planet earth.

Hence, they do not influence others for Christ, nor do they make a positive impact on the culture around them. These same cultural analysts also indicate that our window of opportunity for proclaiming God’s message may be closing. The time for a “business as usual” approach to Christianity in western culture is over. It is time for Christians to once again give themselves wholeheartedly to God’s agenda of making disciples.

Application

1. What principles from this lesson have had the greatest impact on you?
2. What have you learned from the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer?
3. What are your greatest hindrances to spiritually multiplying?
4. Who are some of the potential spiritual multipliers you know? Ask God to raise up a spiritual multiplier into whom you could pour your life.

SESSION 23

How Did Jesus Do Ministry?

Overview

In our last session, we looked at “spiritual multiplication.” First we defined the term, then we looked at the biblical pattern for it found in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Finally, we covered the mindset and motivation necessary for those who desire to spiritually multiply.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will look at how Jesus carried out His discipleship ministry. In addition, we will look at some characteristics of the discipleship ministries of Paul and Peter. Then we will discuss how to apply these principles to our own ministries.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Jesus’ Method of Reaching the World

It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow him. This revealed immediately the direction his evangelistic strategy would take. His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow. Remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather these men before he ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. Men were to be his method of winning the world to God.

Robert Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism, p. 27

Discuss: Why did Jesus prioritize discipling a few over preaching to many? How would this make Him more effective at reaching the world?

What Is Discipleship?

Discipleship is simply one individual helping another learn, understand, and live out what is being taught. In the case of our faith, it means helping someone else learn about God and His Word, understand these principles, and apply them to life.

The Discipleship Ministry of Jesus

Jesus was the master discipler. It makes sense, then, for us to see what we can learn from His discipleship ministry. Several passages from the gospels are listed below. As you read each passage, observe how Jesus carried out His ministry.

1. John 17:9-12: Jesus prayed for His disciples.

This is our first and foremost responsibility to those we disciple. God may use our prayers even more than our teaching, modeling, or personal encouragement.

2. Matthew 22:22-33, 24:35: Jesus taught them the Scriptures.

Why is it important to teach the Scriptures?

3. Luke 4:1; John 5:30: Jesus relied upon the Holy Spirit's power.

Even Jesus, the God-man, submitted Himself to walk humbly in the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. Matthew 9:35-10:16: Jesus trained His disciples and sent them out.

What types of training have been helpful to you in your own growth and ministry?

Why is it important to send people out after training them?

5. Matthew 14:22: Jesus urged His disciples to take steps of faith.

What is a recent step of faith that you have taken? What was the outcome?

Why do people need urging and encouragement in order to take steps of faith?

What steps of faith might you encourage those you are discipling to take?

6. John 4:27-42: Jesus modeled evangelism.

How did Jesus take advantage of the opportunity at the well?

7. John 13:1-17: Jesus modeled servant leadership.

Jesus was a servant-leader, modeling a radical commitment to put the interests and welfare of others before His own, even to the point of death. (See Philippians 2:8.)

How has someone modeled servant leadership to you? What effect did this have on you?

8. John 17:6-21: Jesus prepared His disciples to continue His ministry after He was gone.

Jesus prepared His disciples to continue His ministry long after He was gone. The success of Jesus' worldwide mission depended on His ministry of training and equipping His disciples to carry on toward the goal of helping fulfill the Great Commission.

The Discipleship Ministries of Paul and Peter

1. The ministry of Paul

Read Paul's words to the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

What was Paul's motive for ministry (v. 12)?

What qualities do you see in Paul that made him an effective discipler?

v. 7

v.8

v. 9

v. 10

v. 11

v. 12

Paul's first concern was the spiritual welfare of his converts. Paul demonstrated that discipling others is hard work and often involves

personal sacrifice. Discipling others often comes at the expense of our personal comfort and convenience.

2. The ministry of Peter

Read Peter's words to church leaders ("elders") in 1 Peter 5:1-4. He told them to "Be shepherds of God's flock" (v.2). He went on to spell out for them just how they were to carry out their shepherding responsibilities.

- ◆ They were to shepherd God's flock willingly (v.2).
- ◆ They were to serve eagerly (v. 2).
- ◆ They were not to lord it over the people (v. 3).
- ◆ They were to lead by example (v. 3).

Discuss: Which of Peter's ministry principles are currently most applicable to your discipleship ministry?

The Rewards of Discipling Others

According to the following passages, what are some of the rewards of discipleship?

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1Thessalonians 2:19-20

2 John 4

Application

Discuss the following questions with your disciple-trainer:

Which characteristics of the discipleship ministry of Jesus are most relevant to your ministry right now? Are there any practical steps you need to take?

What (or who) is your hope or joy? What makes life worth living?

What motivates you in the area of discipleship?

Who has been a "Paul" or "Peter" to you in the area of discipleship? What did you learn from him or her?

Are you presently a "Paul" or "Peter" to someone else?

SESSION 24

Living With an Eternal Perspective

Overview

In our last session, we examined the area of discipleship. We looked at the characteristics of a discipleship ministry as modeled by Jesus, Paul, and Peter. Then we applied these principles to our own ministries.

REAL FAITH

In this session, we will begin by looking at the difference between an *eternal* and a *temporal* perspective, and we will evaluate whether our life decisions are made according to the former or the latter. Then we will learn how the perspective we hold affects our view of truth, our view of the world around us, and our view of our own significance. Finally, we will consider how we can live more consistently according to an eternal perspective.

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse: Matthew 6:33

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 *We live by faith, not by sight.*

Hebrews 11:6a *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Galatians 3:11b *The righteous will live by faith.*

Romans 14:23b *Everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Temporal Versus Eternal

In the first century, the Apostle Paul wrote these words:

*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen,
but on what is unseen.*

*For what is seen is **temporary**,
but what is unseen is **eternal**.*

2 Corinthians 4:18

The word *temporal* refers to anything that is of the world, anything that will not last. *Eternal* refers to those things that last beyond life on this planet and into God's eternal kingdom. Temporal things are not wrong in and of themselves. God created everything in the world for our use and enjoyment. However, God warns believers to guard against allowing temporal things to become central in our lives (i.e. having a "temporal perspective").

How Do You Make Decisions?

Look at the questions below. What two or three of these questions are you most likely to ask yourself when facing a decision? Place a check next to them.

- Will it help me get ahead?
- Will it draw people to Christ?
- Will this build someone up or tear someone down?
- Will this give me more security?
- How could this affect another believer?
- Will this help me be more effective for God?
- How will this affect my Christian growth?
- Will others be impressed?
- What kind of return will I get?
- Is this in line with God's Word?
- Is it to my advantage?

Now go back and place a "T" or an "E" next to the questions, indicating whether each question represents a "Temporal" or "Eternal" perspective.

Discuss: Which view has been dominant in your life?

Why do believers have difficulty maintaining an eternal perspective?

What hinders you from maintaining an eternal perspective?

Eternal Versus Temporal Perspective: Where Do We See It?

Where do we see the clash of these two views in the world around us?

1. In our view of truth

We live our lives on the basis of our belief system. People act on what they believe to be true, even if those beliefs are not true. Being sincere

about some belief does not make that belief true. How does an eternal or temporal perspective affect our view of truth?

◆ Temporal view

Because our human perspective is based on our limited knowledge and experience, it is incomplete. Our perspective also is influenced by the unbiblical values of this world. We are a product of the culture in which we grew up. Each of the world's cultures contain some values that parallel Scripture and others that do not. This means that change in us is necessary. If we live according to a temporal perspective, then our measurement of what is true will be based on the world's values rather than God's (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

◆ Eternal view

An eternal perspective enables us to live in light of God's truth, rather than what we perceive to be true through our limited knowledge. Living according to God's wisdom will appear to be foolishness to the world, but it is based on the true measure of reality: God's eternal truth (1 Corinthians 2:6-10).

It is easy to believe the wisdom of men and thus pursue values that have our own interests and comfort as the goal. However, what satisfies and gratifies us now is not necessarily in our best interests in light of eternity. Having an eternal perspective will enable us to discern and apply God's truth.

***Discuss:* Can you think of any examples of a clash over truth in our culture?**

2. In our view of this world

◆ Temporal view

Read 1 John 2:15-17. How is a temporal view of the world described in this passage?

◆ Eternal view

As you read the following passages, jot down key words and phrases which describe an eternal view of this world.

Philippians 3:20

Hebrews 11:13-16

Discuss: What does it mean that our citizenship is in heaven?

What does it mean for a Christian to be an “alien” or “stranger” here on earth?

Since our citizenship is in heaven, how should we view our life here on earth?

3. In our view of significance

◆ Temporal view (Matthew 6:19-21)

People who hold the world’s values pursue all that the world system offers. They try to find significance in accomplishments of worldly value, such as acquiring wealth, having possessions, being influential, achieving important career goals, having social status, etc. While there is nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves, they will never give true significance or be of eternal value (v. 19).

Read Matthew 6:19-21. What are we to not store up? Why?

◆ Eternal view (Matthew 6:19-21)

People who see the world from God’s viewpoint realize that significance comes through being rightly related to God. The only accomplishments of true, eternal significance are those that serve to advance God’s kingdom rather than worldly interests (v. 20-21).

Read Matthew 6:19-21 again. What are we to store up? How do we do this?

Discuss: Give an example of how you tried to gain significance from a temporal perspective. How was this satisfying? Unsatisfying?

How has your view of gaining significance changed as you have grown in your relationship with God?

An Eternal Perspective: Why Pursue It?

Read the following passages. As you read, write down any principles you find which explain the benefits of living with an eternal perspective.

Luke 12:15-21

Matthew 6:25-34

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

***Discuss:* Which of the above benefits is of most value to you? Why?**

Application: How to Develop an Eternal Perspective

No one is born with an eternal perspective. In fact, if we are not intentional about developing and maintaining an eternal perspective, we will become more and more temporal in our thinking throughout the course of our lives. Instead, we need to continually adjust our way of thinking by reading, understanding, and applying God's truth to life.

- 1. Daily immerse yourself in God's truth.**
(Colossians 3:16, Romans 12:2, Philippians 4:8)
- 2. Measure your values and decisions against the truth of God's Word.**
(Joshua 1:8)
- 3. Daily make God's kingdom your highest priority.**
(Matthew 6:33, Colossians 3:1-3)
- 4. Live by faith, not by sight.**
(2 Corinthians 5:6-7, Galatians 3:11)

This week, be intentional about listening to your own self-talk and also to the words of others. Evaluate what you hear. Is what you hear based on an eternal perspective or a temporary perspective? Ask God to help you think and live more and more in light of eternity.

