

AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP – LONGEVITY PART 1

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Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:6

We've been looking at discipleship and what it means to be authentic disciples of Jesus. In the past three weeks, we talked first about submission, that we come to a place where we submit to His will, or the will of the Master, that as disciples we do what the Master wants us to do. Then we unpacked a little more by seeing that obedience is a key factor in our walk as disciples of Jesus. We looked at four different ways or different facets of obedience – we need to be able to do the things that God wants us to do, that we need to be able to go to the places that God wants us to go, that we also need to be able to say the things that God wants us to say, and then to be able to be the kind of people that God wants us to be, and then to be able to be the kind of people that God wants us to be.

And last week we said that one of the traits of being a good disciple is that there will be fruit, that there must be fruitfulness in the life of a disciple. We also looked at John 15 where Jesus said that for any of us as disciples to bear fruit, we must be connected to Him. The branches must be connected to the vine. Disconnected from the vine meant no fruit, and disconnected from Jesus meant that there would not be any fruit either. So it was a good call to each one of us to check a connection with the Lord and see if there is a good connection. Then to look at our lives and ask the question whether there is fruit in my life. And if we had to look twice, then to look back at the connection that we have with Jesus and ask: Is my connection with Him right?

This Sunday I want to submit to you that another important aspect of being a disciple of Jesus is that we have longevity. In other words, as disciples do we stay the course? Are we persevering? Are we not giving up? Are we finishing well? Sometimes we start with great zeal and fervor, and we say: this is what I'm going to do, this is how I'm going to do it, and the joy of the Lord is my strength. And we can see the very presence of God on our countenances. Then, as time goes on, as the difficulties come and the challenges arise, we kind of back off a little bit. We begin to try and fight those on our own steam, and pretty soon we're off the road. We're sitting by the side and we've kind of disengaged from a dynamic Christian community.

And longevity as a disciple is so important. Paul would say in 2 Timothy 4:6-7

⁶ *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.*"

Paul has been a Christian for about 33-35 years, and he's reaching the end.

⁸ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.*

Every time I read that, I think to myself: That's what I/you need to be able to say, that at the end, as we finish, we say that we have kept the faith – the same vibrant faith that we took in when we had that meeting with the Master and we invited Him into our lives. That same vibrancy and excitement to ask: do I still have it? have I kept the faith in that way or somewhere along the way, have I checked out, and am going through the motions? I'll just do what I need to do.

I fought the good fight; I finished the course and I've kept the faith.

So longevity as a disciple, is so important, that what started in our lives, we need to finish it as well. from God's part – we know from Philippians, He says "The work that I start, I will complete." The point is: are we connected into that work that He wants to complete in our lives? So let's look at longevity and see if we can expand it a little bit.

Key Ingredients to having a good long faithful life as a disciple.

We need to persevere.

Because the thing that can railroad us, that can get us off track is when difficulties arise. Are we able to press on? Are we able to persevere past it. The Bible is full of references about perseverance. Here are a few:

2 Chronicles 15:7 *But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.*

Hebrews 10:23 *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life.*

I know that on any given Sunday, there are many of you who come in here under the weight of a trial or a challenging situation. Church is all about meeting with one another and experiencing God's grace at moments like this. It's not that He can't meet you at home as well. He can, but church is the place that God has designed for us to come together, physically to be together as iron sharpens iron.

Galatians 6:9 *"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we don't give up."*

The good things that God wants to do. Don't get to a point where you say "I'm tired of doing this day in and day out." We will reap what we have sown if we don't give up.

Hebrews 10:36

"For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised."

Matthew 24:13

"But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

So, I want to throw this out to you Church, as you think about your own lives, as you think about this journey as being a disciple of Jesus: Where do you think you are? Are you still following hard after Him or has your life degenerated down to just "let me do what I think is necessary, convenient or comfortable"? Do you still have the vibrancy, the energy, the focus that a disciple of the Most High God must have?

We must endure.

How then do we endure? How do we stay the course? How do we not give up? How do we persevere through tribulation? How do I keep the faith? How? That is always the question. We know what we need to do by heart. But it's "how" that we need to find out.

Let me give you a couple of ways that I think we need to put into our lives so that we can make sure that we persevere and we endure.

TO HAVE LONGEVITY IN OUR LIVES WE HAVE TO HAVE: AN ENDURING PASSION FOR THE MASTER.

This is the first point. The keywords are:

- Enduring – it has to be ongoing.

- Passionate! Not lukewarm, but a passionate relationship with God.

Paul understood this well because he understood that love plays a part as a motivator in helping us to do the things that God wants us to do. He says: "For the love of God constraineth me." In this case, he's talking about evangelism. The motivation for him to do that is love – love for God.

Jesus Himself brought this up when three times He asked Peter, "Peter, do you love Me?" And I want you to notice that it was only after Peter answered the question that Jesus released him for ministry. So often, we get the cart before the horse. We say: I'll leave all this aside, loving Jesus and all. I've got to do these things. But the doing beloved, comes from the being, from being in an active dynamic relationship with Jesus. Out of that comes the doing. "Do you love Me? Tell me that Peter, first." "Yes, I do, Lord." "Feed My sheep. Do you love Me?" "Yes." "Tend My flock. Do you love Me?" "Yes." "Shepherd My sheep." First that question: Do you love Me?

Let me give you three of the many ways of how to grow in our love for God. Because I've reached this point very often in my life. How do I love God? What do I do? I accept that I need to love God more, but what do I do?

1. **We need to know Him more.** You cannot love someone or have passion for someone you do not know. Like Mary, we need to sit at His feet and listen to His words. How do we do that? we need to set aside regular time for personal meditation and prayer and reading the Word. This is the point at which most of our eyes glaze up. "Oh gosh! I've heard this so many times from every pulpit, from every preacher." We need to grow in the Word. We need to have a better quiet time, personal time, prayer time – we know all that. but how do we put it in place? And why do we not have it after knowing that this is important? Why is it that we still go our own way, that we still follow our flesh? How does that happen?

Jack Deere, a wonderful writer who unpacks how do you listen to the word of God and the voice of the Spirit, says that it is basically a simple mechanical problem. What is the problem? We fail to schedule time with Him.

When I have pre-marital counselling, I explain to the couple that the love that they have for each other needs to grow; they need to do three things: They are the three P's – Plan, Prioritize and Protect.

- You've got to plan to have a quiet time. if it's not part of your plan, it'll never happen. You have to plan to read the Word.
- You've got to prioritize it over everything else. Give it the priority it needs. Even before you put your work schedule in, put the time that you're going to spend with God. Put that in from 5 to 6 in the morning, or from 12 to 1 in the afternoon, or whenever. This time is my time with God.
- Protect it. Nothing is going to come and take away that time. if you get a phone call during that time, don't take it. Don't answer. That's the only way that we will grow in our relationship with God.

If we have a consistent time with Him, whether it's 15 minutes or half an hour, or 45 minutes or an hour, however much time that you're able to say, "Lord this is my time that I'm giving you. This is the time that is earmarked, that has Your name on it." When I look at my day timer, it says "time with God" and nothing comes in the way. That's the only way beloved, for us to grow in our relationship with Him.

We live under the illusion that we will always have time to pray and meditate on the Word. That is one of the devil's most successful lies. The devil knows that if he can keep you out of

God's presence, he will defeat you. The devil can't do anything about your salvation. No one can pluck you out of the Lord's hand, but he can certainly mess with you every day in your walk as a disciple. That's what he can do. He can blunt your love for the Lord by filling your day with so many other things. He can give you false hopes and aspirations. He can tell you to settle for the good instead of going for the best that the Lord has for you.

So, if you're going to grow, get to know Him first; plan, prioritize and protect. Be like Joshua. Meditate on the Word of God, day and night. Be like Paul; pray continuously or like Mary, sit at the feet of Jesus.

2. Make sure that no barrier exists between Him and you.

What kind of barrier can prevent us from connecting with Him? The sin barrier. Something that we do, something that is done, that has brought guilt upon us. In every relationship, barriers are erected through misunderstandings and wrongs. When we hurt somebody we love, we cannot really enjoy their company until that hurt has been removed. It is no different with our relationship with the Lord. And the moment we do something that is wrong and it's unconfessed, we haven't dealt with it, then we run and hide.

We know that from the very first chapter in the Bible – Adam and Eve sinned, and they were the ones who had such wonderful communion with God. How wonderful to take a walk with God! Have you thought about that? just walking with God and saying, "God, what were you thinking when you made the rhinoceros? How did you plan all this? You know the mountains and the rain and the clouds and the stars – what was in your mind?? Just to be able to chat with Him – that's what heaven will be like.

But that's what gets taken away when we sin because the guilt moves us away from God and the only way back is to let the precious blood that was shed at Calvary cleanse us. If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. We go to Him and ask for forgiveness and cleansing. This is important because if you have sin and it's unconfessed, then what happens is that you then have guilt. When you have guilt and you haven't dealt with it, it brings condemnation. When you have condemnation and you still haven't done anything about it, it leads to alienation. You're alienated from a God who you want to draw near to, and it starts with sin. So if we want to have a vital relationship with God, to grow in our passion, we need to take care of the sin barrier.

3. We need to ask God to help us to love Him more.

That sounds so much like an oxymoron! I want to love You Lord; will You help me to love You? But the truth is that is the only way that you and I can love, because the love that you and I have are all causal loves. There's a cause and an effect. I love because...

All three loves – phileo, storge and Eros are causal loves. The only love that is non-causal is agape love, and it comes from God. It is agape love that He's talking about. And the only one who can give it to us is God Himself. So we go to Him and say: "Lord, fill me with this kind of love, this love that has no cause. I just love You, Lord. help me to grow in my love for You."

James reminds us that we don't have because we haven't asked. So if we haven't asked God for His love, then maybe it's time we started asking, even today. "Lord, would You help me to love? Would you give me that love? Would you create a capacity to hold that kind of love?" Sometimes we do all the disciplines; we read the Bible, we pray, we have our meditation, but

we don't have an actual relationship with God. And what happens then? It just begins to be legalistic. It doesn't touch our heart. We really don't know the One we follow.

Mike Bickle, the founder of IHOP, the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, says that one day He heard the Lord speak to him and say this, "If you ever make it in the Christian life, it won't be because you are a good follower. It will be because My Son is a good leader. Put your confidence in His ability to lead you, not in your ability to follow." Wise words! He wasn't saying that the disciplines are not important or that we just hang out and say we'll wait for God to work in us passively. No! He's pointing out something. Our hearts are incredibly prone to deception. Jeremiah 17:9 says The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick. Who can understand it? And our feet are equally prone to wander off the path of righteousness. Given that, given who we are, can we ever hope and trust ourselves? no, we trust in Him to lead us well.

So we ask the Father to help us love His Son and surely, that will be a prayer that He will grant. To be able to say: Lord, You help me to love Him so much that I can just follow Him. The things that He's asking me to do as He leads me, I just do. And automatically, I'm moving behind Him.

WE MUST BE SPIRIT-FILLED.

That is our second point. We cannot go through life just being nominal. We have to be able to allow God's Spirit to flow through us and empower us. We must be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.

There are 2 other points that I really want us to focus on, but we'll do that next week. In the meanwhile, we look at these three areas that we've spoken about. What do we do to have an enduring passion for Him? Ask the question: do I really know Him? What do I know about Him? Do I know His traits? Do I know His character?

When I tell young people how to do a Bible study, I tell them that every time you read scripture, even if it's just a chapter, look at it and ask the question: what have I learned about God that I didn't know before? Or what character trait of God is embedded in this scripture? And write it down. Fill your book. There will be. time when you look through it and see what kind of a person God is, and that might be just what you need for the situation you're going through.

Would we take the time this week to plan and prioritize and protect the time that you're going to spend with Him. Don't leave it to catch up with God at the end of the day. Give Him more importance than anything else that is in your day. Prioritize Him and then protect the time that you have with Him, and then put in place all those things, and ask Him to help you to love Him more.
