



*Part Two*

# FOLLOWING JESUS TO GLORY

Discipleship Series



*Grace*  
Evangelical Free Church

*Part Two*

**FOLLOWING JESUS TO GLORY**

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# Introduction

This booklet is the second part of *Follow Me*. The first part explains how we follow Jesus to the cross. Following Jesus to the cross means believing in the infinitely glorious God of the Bible, that He made us glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, that we've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory, that the wages of our sin is death, that Jesus died on the cross in our place to pay the wages of our sin, and that we gain access to Jesus' sacrificial death and the eternal life it purchased by trusting in Jesus alone.

The Christian life (following Jesus) begins (from our perspective) when we initially and decisively come to trust in Jesus for the first time and continues forever when we enter eternity with God in heaven. Most people, if they have any understanding of Christianity at all, understand these two things—needing to initially decide to follow Jesus (usually by praying a particular prayer) and gaining eternal life (heaven). What's less clear to most, however, is what happens in between. That's the point of the second part of this booklet: we become increasingly like Jesus as we follow Jesus on our way from the cross to glory.

We come to the cross of Jesus as desperate sinners needing grace. At the cross we find grace, beautifully and sufficiently. And from there, in this life, we continue following Jesus in the grace guaranteed by the cross. At the cross, God's grace comes to us regenerating and converting us. From the cross it comes to us by causing us to persevere in faith and transforming us increasingly into Christ's likeness.

Being a follower of Jesus does not mean having everything figured out. It does not mean being perfect. It does not mean never messing up. Following Jesus from the cross means being in the process of becoming more like Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. In order to do this, we need to know who Jesus is and what He is like. Our prayer is that you will see who He is and where He is going in order that, by His Spirit, you may follow Him wherever He leads and whatever it costs in this life, on your way to the next.

Please, never forget that from beginning to end in the life of a Christian, there is a mysterious partnership between the Christian and God. From conversion to heaven, from the minute that you start to follow Jesus to the minute you close your eyes to this earth, from the time that the Gospel comes to you in power, conviction, and joy to the time when the Gospel is your only sustenance, you have to fight with all that you have (with the will and the strength that God alone can provide) while trusting in God to make you into what you need to be (Philippians 2:12-13).

It is only by some mysterious combination of our great effort and the greater power and grace of God that we will want, and be able to be the kind of person God calls us to be and do the kinds of things God calls us to do. In other words, we will never be able to be a disciple of Jesus unless we go for it with all that we have while trusting in God to provide the necessary will and strength. If we leave out either aspect of this strange, divinely-ordained combination we will always fail.

We have summarized what Jesus is like and what He calls us to and promises to transform us into when He calls us to follow Him in seven characteristics: A disciple of Jesus is a person in the process of 1) rightly understanding God and His Word, 2) becoming a worshiper/lover of God, 3) recognizing his or her dependence on God, 4) living as a part of the body of Christ (Jesus is the head), 5) becoming a suffering servant, 6) growing in godliness, and 7) becoming a debtor/lover of people.

## **HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

The main purpose of this book is to help you understand and grow to be more like Jesus. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. All who trust in the gospel are called to be mature disciples. This book can help you to do that. But Jesus also commissions all Christians to go and make disciples (Matt 28:18-20). This book is intended to read together with one or two other people. It will challenge you to grow as you help others grow in following Jesus too.

Here's a few simple things to keep in mind as you work through the book.

- Each chapter will have discussion questions to help you take someone else through the book. Take the time to answer the questions for yourself and use them to create deeper discussion when you meet together.
- There is also a prayer at the end of each chapter that tries to focus on the main idea of that chapter and is based on a relevant passage of scripture. It is a way to help give you ideas for how to pray. Be sure you pray after each chapter, especially when you meet with someone else.

- Think of ways to immediately put the chapter into practice. If the chapter is on knowing God's word, make a plan to have a quiet time this week. If the chapter is on fasting, find a time to do it.
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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think it means to recognize and follow Jesus? Do you think that you would be able to recognize Jesus if you saw Him?
2. What are some things that make you want to follow Jesus? Are there ways that you aren't sure you want to follow Jesus?
3. What if Jesus leads you places that you don't want to go?

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to save me. Give me greater faith to trust you and know that my sins are forgiven by Christ alone. Help me to learn to follow Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit and his power. Help me to work out my salvation with fear and trembling, always remembering that you are working with me to will and work for your good pleasure. Amen.*

*One*

# WIPING AWAY THE STEAM

Seeing God and His Word Rightly

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Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you...

JOHN 17:25

As a reminder, the aim of this booklet is to help you fall in love with Jesus and, by His grace, follow Him wherever He leads and whatever it costs. That is, our prayer is that God might use this booklet to bring you to a greater understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and develop in you a greater sense of urgency to pursue Him!

Before we go on, please cry out to God that He might help you recognize the importance of this. We're called to follow Jesus—not a mere man who lived and died 2000 years ago, but the living God of the universe! What a calling.

## PREPARING FOR A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING

Our first step in gaining an understanding of who Jesus is, and therefore what it means to follow Him, is to take a look at the fact that Jesus rightly understands *who God is* and *what He has said*. That is, the point of this chapter is to draw your attention to the fact that Christ-followers are growing in their ability to see God and His Word rightly. Again, Jesus has a perfect understanding of God (indeed, He is God) and His Word (Jesus is the Word of God). If we are going to follow Him and become like Him we too must have a right understanding of who God is and what He has said.

In my experience the best place to start this process is by first recognizing that we've bought into many lies about God and then working to get rid of them. I often wonder how many people in this world are following someone that they mistakenly think is Jesus (Matthew 7:21-23). Ask yourself, what are some of the lies that you have heard? Some have said that Jesus is just a good man, an important prophet, a good moral teacher, one of the many ways to God, weak,

boring, a myth, etc. What lies have you heard about Jesus?

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? <sup>10</sup> I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).*

In this passage Jeremiah reminds us that all of our hearts are deceived and that we have all bought into certain lies about God. In this same passage we learn that God alone can search us and reveal our misunderstandings to us. Ask God to do just that. Take a few minutes to pray and ask God to search your heart and reveal any deceit or sickness.

It is also important to note that being purged of lies about God is a continual process that requires God’s continual presence and grace. If we are to have any hope of coming to a right understanding of God and His Word, we must continually call on God to purify us of all unrighteousness.

Next, if we are to develop a right understanding of God and His Word, we must replace the lies of this world with truth. Obviously, following a fake Jesus will not do. We must get rid of the lies we have bought into concerning Jesus and replace them with truth.

*“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:14-17).*

As John 17 teaches us, we replace lies with truth primarily through the Word of God. Our only hope of recognizing and following Jesus is through the Word of God. We have no hope of being a Christian, a disciple, a follower of Jesus if we do not spend time in the Bible, and through it learn to rightly understand who God is and what He has said. In the Bible, God has put Himself on display for all to see and savor! Like purging ourselves from the lies of this world, coming to a right understanding of God and His Word is a continual process that requires God’s continual presence and grace.

## **RIGHTLY UNDERSTANDING GOD**

Now it’s time to wipe away the steam. It’s time to take a look at God as He truly is. Look at Him. Let’s look at him together as He’s revealed himself in His Word. Look at Him! This is God. Is this increasingly becoming your understanding of God?

## GOD IS...

**Trinitarian** – God exists as three persons, yet He is one God. (Matthew 3:16-17)

**Independent** – God does not need anything. (Acts 17:24-25)

**Unchanging** – God never changes. (Psalm 102:25-27)

**Eternal** – God has no beginning and no end. (Psalm 90:2)

**Omnipresent** – God is always everywhere. (Jeremiah 23:23-24)

**Simple** – God is not made up of parts.

**Omniscient** – God knows everything. (1 John 3:20)

**Truthful** – God never lies. (John 17:3)

**Good** – God is worthy of approval. (Luke 18:19)

**Loving** – God gives of Himself to others. (1 John 4:8)

**Merciful, Gracious, Patient** – God is good toward those in distress (merciful), toward those who deserve punishment (gracious), and God is good in that He withholds punishment from sinners for a time (patient). (Exodus 34:6)

**Holy** – God is completely separate from sin. (Exodus 26:33)

**Peaceful** – God is ordered. (1 Corinthians 14:33)

**Righteous and Just** – God does what is right. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

**Jealous** – God continually seeks His own glory. (2 Corinthians 11:2)

**Wrathful** – God hates all sin. (Exodus 32:9-10)

**Omnipotent** – God is able to do everything that He wills. (Genesis 18:14)

**Perfect** – He completely possesses all excellent qualities. (Matthew 5:48)

**Beautiful** – God is the sum of all desirable qualities. (Psalm 27:4)

**Glorious** – God is awesome! (Isaiah 43:7)

*(This list was taken from Wayne Grudem's, "Systematic Theology")*

*"Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even*

*the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you” (Nehemiah 9:5-6).*

The God of the Bible is infinitely more beautiful and wonderful and holy and majestic and powerful and awesome than the greatest human mind can comprehend. His power knows no end, His justice is perfect, His mercy is like a never-ending tide, His holiness is whiter than the whitest snow, His knowledge is exhaustive, and His love cannot be contained by all creation. He has existed and will continue existing in all His beauty forever. He has no beginning and no end. He placed every star in the sky. He knows every atom in the universe by name. He stands alone in honor and value and worth. His name is above all names. He has no equal. What a God! Look at Him! Fall in love with Him! Follow Him!

As followers of Jesus we must grow to rightly understand God and we do this primarily through His Word. “

## **RIGHTLY UNDERSTANDING GOD’S WORD**

But what does a right understanding of God’s Word consist of? Or what does it mean to rightly understand God’s Word? There are six key elements to a right understanding of the Bible that I want to highlight here.

First, the Bible is from God. This is probably the most important thing that you can know about the Bible: it is from God! The Bible, contrary to popular opinion, is not just some stuff that a bunch of guys decided to write down about God. Rather, the Bible is God’s Word to people. Over and over the Bible claims this about itself (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:16-21; etc.).

Second, the Bible has no errors (Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6; Psalm 119:96 ). That is, because it is from God, who has no errors, as the Bible was originally written, there were no errors in it. We have (almost without exception) what was originally written. We can therefore have extreme confidence that what we read in the Bible is what God wants us to know and that in obeying the Bible we are doing the will of God.

Third, the Bible is a collection of writings inspired by God but written by men. Again, the Bible is God’s word to us. But what does this mean? Simply put, it means that God inspired different men throughout the course of history—within their personality, position, and situation in life—to write down that which He wanted us to know.

Even though the men who copied down God’s words were not perfect, God made sure that what they wrote down was perfect. That is, every word that we read in our Bibles is from God; and so every word that we read in our Bibles is perfect.

Fourth, the Bible has principles which account for every area of life. Everything that we do and think and feel is addressed in the Bible (from eating and drinking to sports to dating to movie watching to video game playing to vacationing to working to listening to music to playing music to dealing with depression to overcoming pride to drawing to interacting with your family to going to church to fighting to surfing the web to smoking pot to cutting...). That is, the Bible has principles that are to guide every area of our lives.

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

Fifth, the Word of God is necessary for our salvation and for rightly understanding God. That is, apart from the Word of God, we cannot be saved and we cannot truly know God (Romans 10:13-17; 2 Timothy 3:15). God has chosen to reveal Himself to us and save us through His Word (1 Peter 1:23). In His Word alone is eternal life (John 6:68; 14:6)!

Finally, sixth, a right understanding of the Bible leads to great longing for God and His Word. This is another one of those “it’s-difficult-to-overstate-the-importance-of-this-point” kind of points. When you love someone, any form of communication from that person is something that you will cherish—even long for. The fact that Christ-followers love God more than anything means that they cherish God and communication with God more than anything. The Bible is God’s primary means of communicating with us. It is God’s letter to us. The Bible is our chance to know who God is, what He wants, who we are, what we are to do, and how we are to do it. Through the Bible God lets us know how to get to heaven and how to live our lives. It is an amazing gift and all Christ-followers must grow to see rightly and long for it as such.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, there are two additional points that I would like to make. First, it takes a relationship with Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:18) and the help of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 119:18) to rightly understand and love God and His Word. If you desire to know, love, and obey God and to follow Jesus, you must spend time in your Bible. If you desire to spend time in your Bible, you must begin by praying to God for forgiveness and understanding.

Second, go for it! Like so much of Christianity, getting into the Bible means stepping out in faith. It means trying things that are hard or don’t necessarily make sense. If you find it difficult to be consistent in reading God’s Word or if you find it difficult to understand God’s Word, find someone to work through it with you. On the other hand, if spending time in God’s Word is a joy to you

or if you find that God has given you spiritual insight into it, find someone to work through it with.

Remember, our calling is to follow Jesus—wherever He leads and whatever it costs. That is, by the grace and power of God, we are to submit our lives to Jesus that we might become more like Jesus. In order to follow Jesus and become more like Him, we need to know who He is and where He is going. In God's Word we find that Jesus is going from the cross to glory (and, therefore, so must we) and that Jesus has a right understanding of the Father and His Word (and again, therefore, so must we).

The first aspect of following Jesus and becoming like Him (of being a disciple of Jesus) is in coming to understand God and His Word rightly. Please pray that God would grant you, through your effort and His power, such a gift!

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What has your experience been with the Bible?
2. Have you ever tried to read the Bible? What was easy and hard about it?
3. When is the last time that you made a decision based on the Bible? What happened?
4. Why do you spend so much/little time in the Bible?
5. What are you going to do differently as a result of the things that you learned in this chapter?

## PRAYER

*Father in heaven, thank you again for sending Jesus Christ. We would not know you or how to worship you unless you revealed yourself to us. Thank you for telling us in your Word who you are, how to obey you and displaying your glory. Make my heart seek you and not wander from your commandments. Help me to know your Word better that I might not sin against you. I want to delight in your Word and be satisfied. May I read it, meditate on it, memorize it and treasure the Bible and the glorious truths it contains about you. Amen*

Two

# WHOLLY SATISFIED

Worshiper and Lover of God

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Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul  
and with all your mind.

MATTHEW 22:37

Once again, the point of this booklet is to take a look at what it means to be a disciple/follower of Jesus. We have said that there are seven key qualities of a disciple. A disciple of Jesus is one in the Holy Spirit initiated and led process of 1) becoming a worshiper/ loving God, 2) becoming a debtor/lover people, 3) recognizing his or her dependence on God, 4) rightly understanding God and His Word, 5) living as a part of the body of Christ (Jesus is the head), 6) growing in godliness, and 7) becoming a suffering servant. This focus of this chapter is on the second quality: the fact that a disciple is growing as a lover and worshiper of God.

## LOVERS OF GOD

Have you ever stopped to think about the definition of love? What does it mean to love someone or something? What does love look like or feel like? What are some ideas about love in our world today? In this chapter I want to offer the same somewhat unconventional definition of love as I did in Part One; one that I believe is far more biblical than any of the other definitions that I have come across. This is a rather humbling task as the Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8), that God loves us (John 3:16), that we are to love others (Matthew 22:39), and that we are to love God (Matthew 22:35-38). Nevertheless, I believe that there is an understanding of love that captures the big-picture meaning of love in each of these biblical truths?

I believe that true, transcendent, biblical love is: *the affectionate pursuit of that which is best.*

Therefore, when the Bible says that God is love, it means that God delights in pursuing that which is best. When the Bible teaches that God loves us, it means that God is committed to joyfully going after that which is best for us. When the Bible commands us to love others, it is commanding us to affectionately pursue that which is best for them. And again, when the Bible commands us to love God, it is commanding us to go after, in happiness, that which is best for God.

Before moving on, I want to provide two points of clarification: First, by “the affectionate pursuit” I mean possessing a deep longing for what’s best, a sense of delight in the attainment of what’s best, and a willingness to sacrifice to get what’s best. Second, by “best” I mean that which is truly best—not most appealing at any given moment.

So, what is best? Best for us? Best for others? Best for God? The answer is...God! God is what is best for us. God is what’s best for others. God is what’s best for God. God is what is best!

*“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders” (Exodus 15:11)?*

Here we are left with a most remarkable truth: Being a lover of God means realizing and wanting what’s best for God, namely, God! Loving Him means wanting, with all that we have and are, God to be glorified; wanting Him to receive the honor and fame and glory due to His name. The greatest thing—the most important thing—that we can do in this life, is to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

*“One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*

*This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:35-38).*

But what does it mean to love God or to want what’s best for God with all our heart, soul, and mind?

Our hearts are where we feel. It is where our emotions originate. It is where our affections begin. “It was considered to be the seat of the emotions and passions” (ISBE Bible Dictionary). Therefore, loving God with all of our heart means having all of our affections tuned in to God. That is, loving God means that God receiving glory is our joy and your delight, it is our passion and our significance, and it is the object and satisfaction of all our desires.

Our mind is the part of us that thinks and reasons. It is where we make

decisions and process information. Therefore, loving God with all of our mind means scheming, planning, plotting, and devising ways for God to be glorified.

Our soul is the part of our being that makes us who we are; that makes us unique. It is who we are at the core. Therefore, loving God with our soul means being of such a nature that we long, with all that we are (not just our thoughts and emotions), indeed with our whole being, for God to be glorified.

Being a lover of God means realizing and wanting and striving for what's best for God: God!

## **WORSHIPERS OF GOD**

If we are following Jesus; if we are in the process of becoming like Him; if we are one of His disciples, then we are growing in our love for God—our understanding of how glorious God truly is and our desire to see Him rightly honored. Everything that we do then, in response to our love for God, according to the Word of God, is worship!

Worship is not singing. Worship is not sitting through a service. Worship is not an affinity for a particular kind of music. Worship is not being moved by the beauty of a sunset. Worship is our response to our recognition of the greatness of the glory of God, through the cross of Jesus, in the face of Jesus (whether or not we're singing, sitting in a service, listening to music, or in the presence of the beauty of God's creation)! Our whole lives are meant to be such a response.

*“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).*

Everything...EVERYTHING! in our lives is meant to be a response to the greatness of God. Our eating, drinking, driving, swimming, working, playing, singing...Everything that we do is to be a response to our love for God. This is worship. This is what it means to follow Jesus as a lover and worshiper of God! But, how do we do this? How do we eat and drink and drive and swim and work and play and sing for the glory of God?

We eat, for instance, for the glory of God by recognizing that our food is a gift from God (Matthew 6:31-34), thanking Him for it (1 Timothy 4:3-4), using the energy from it to do God's will (1 Peter 4:11), and realizing that it exists to demonstrate something greater (Matthew 4:4).

We work, for instance, for the glory of God when we work hard (Colossians 3:23), as if we were working for God Himself (Colossians 3:23), without fraud

(Leviticus 19:13), to provide for our families (1 Timothy 5:8), not to store up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-20), and while trusting God to meet all our needs (Matthew 6:26).

In other words our entire lives are worship when we look at and act in such a way that recognizes the power and strength and beauty and majesty and splendor and glory and sovereignty and sufficiency of God in all things! Again, we are rightly following Jesus as lovers and worshipers of God when we recognize and respond to the fact that true worship is everything that we do in response to our desire for God to be duly glorified and according to God's Word. And again, everything that we do is meant to be such a response.

## **ONE MORE THING...**

There is one more aspect of being a lover and worshiper of God that I want to highlight (borrowed from C.S. Lewis). Consider an impressive story from your life. Think about something that really impressed you. Remember how you felt, what you thought, what made it special, and how you responded or reacted.

The exciting stories from your life, the very fact that you and I can be impressed, comes from something put inside of us by God which gives us a longing to be satisfied, truly satisfied. That is, we all have certain physical, emotional, and spiritual needs that we must have met. Indeed, we have all found, or are in the process of finding, certain things that satisfy them.

To meet our physical needs we often turn to food for nourishment, doctors for treatment, cloths for comfort, police for protection, etc. To meet our emotional needs we often turn to members of the opposite sex for companionship, name brands for significance, sports or work for accomplishment, friends for importance, drugs for release, etc. To meet our spiritual needs we often turn to music for connection, church for a sense of rightness about our lives, prayer for the appeasement of our conscience, religion for completeness, etc.

Right at the heart of Christianity is the wonderful, magnificent, astounding fact that God alone can meet all of our needs. Further, all of our needs exist to point us to something greater; to something that can truly satisfy us: God.

*“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16-17).*

Every time we eat food we will be hungry again. Every time we hang out with

a friend we will feel lonely again. Every time we engage in religion we will feel empty again. All of our needs exist to remind us of the fact that God alone can forever meet our needs. When we come to God, He can and will satisfy us eternally.

Following Jesus as a lover and worshiper of God means being wholly or completely satisfied in God. And being wholly or completely satisfied in God means recognizing and trusting in the unique sufficiency of God to meet all of our needs. We cannot truly want what's best for God as lovers of God, or truly respond to our love for God with our entire lives as worshipers of God, if we do not realize that God is absolutely and uniquely sufficient to meet all our needs and to satisfy us forever!

Please take a moment to reflect on the sufficiency of God to truly and eternally meet your needs and to truly and eternally satisfy your soul.

When it comes to meeting your physical needs consider the following verses:

**Luke 12:22-33** *“Then Jesus said to His disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.’”*

**Matthew 4:4** *“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

**Psalms 107:8-9** *“Let them give thanks to the LORD for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.”*

**Psalms 145:15-16** *“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”*

When it comes to meeting your emotional needs consider the following verses:

**Matthew 11:28-30** *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

**Isaiah 58:11** *“The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”*

**Philippians 4:19** *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

**Matthew 5:3-12** *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Finally, when it comes to meeting your spiritual needs consider the following verses:

**John 17:3** *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

**Acts 4:14** *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

**John 14:6** *“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”*

Again, being wholly satisfied in God means trusting in Him to meet all of your needs. If you feel lonely, go to God. If you feel hungry, go to God. If you feel

scared, go to God. If you feel nervous, go to God. If you feel insignificant, go to God. If you feel unhappy, go to God. If you feel abandoned, go to God!

## CONCLUSION

Our aim is to follow Jesus. Our focus in this chapter is following Jesus as a lover and worshiper of God. A Christ-like lover of God is one who truly wants what's best for God, namely God! A Christ-like worshiper of God is one whose entire life is a response to his or her love for God; indeed, his or her satisfaction in God.

When we begin to get this—when we begin to follow Jesus in this—God looks altogether different to us. When we begin to recognize, by God's grace, that God is what's best and that only he can satisfy our desires and only he is worthy of our praise, we begin to see how remarkable He truly is. The result is authentic, passionate, and intense love and worship. The songs that we sing begin to take on new feelings. Our time in prayer begins to take on new intimacy. Our time in the Bible begins to take on new depth. All of life begins to take on new meaning.

As we step out in faith in this area God promises to continue to open our eyes to see how wonderful He is and our whole lives will become one big declaration of His greatness. Indeed, we will become, like Christ, true lovers and worshipers of God. If we are to follow Jesus in this way we will look foolish to the world. If we follow Jesus down this path we will have to make some life changes. If we follow Jesus in his path we will have to give up some of the things that provide counterfeit comfort for us. If we follow Jesus in this we will have to work hard. But, if we follow Jesus in this we will honor God, bless others, and demonstrate the authenticity of our faith in Jesus. And remember that none of this is possible without God's help.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you think of this week's chapter? What do you think was the main point (or points)? What stood out to you from it? What is something that you learned from it? What is one question that you have from it?
2. What is the definition offered for love in this chapter? Have you ever

thought of love as “wanting what’s best for someone?” How would this new definition of love change the way that you look at relationships? How is this definition of love different than others?

3. Do you love God like this? How is your love for God like/different from this? How does this understanding change your view of worship?
4. What are you going to do differently as a result of the things that you learned in this chapter?

## PRAYER

*Glorious God, only in you will anyone ever be truly satisfied. Forgive me for the ways I've sought satisfaction apart from you. You loved me before I loved you. Help me respond in love for what you have done through Christ. Help me to worship you with my entire life in Spirit and truth. Help me to see the areas where I need to change my desires. Grow my love for you, and my love for the people around me. You deserve all of my worship for making me a child. Amen.*

## Three

# DEPENDENT TRUSTING

## Recognizing Dependence on God

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*Apart from me you can do nothing.*

JOHN 15:5

Once again, we are talking about what it means to be a disciple/follower of Jesus. So far we have said that a disciple/follower of Jesus is growing to understand God and His Word rightly (one who knows and loves God for who He truly is and His Word as it truly is) and that a disciple/follower of Jesus is growing as a lover and worshiper of God (one who is wholly satisfied in God and whose entire life is worship). In this chapter we are going to focus on a third quality of a follower of Jesus: one who recognizes and responds to the fact that they are completely dependent on God.

One more quick reminder: It is only by some mysterious combination of our great effort and the greater power and grace of God that we will want and be able to be the kind of person God calls us to be and do the kinds of things God calls us to do. In other words, we will never be able to be a disciple of Jesus unless we go for it with all that we have while trusting in God to provide the necessary will and strength. If we leave out either aspect of this strange, divinely ordained, combination we will always fail. With all of that in mind, let's look at the fact that we are completely, absolutely, wholly dependent on God even though we don't completely trust in God.

### **DEPENDENT ON GOD**

The first thing to see in this regard is that we all rely on God for everything! Whether we know it or not, we are all completely dependent on God. We often hear Christians talking about the need to depend on God. While there is something to this (which we will talk about in a minute), the truth is that we could not be more dependent on God. Without Him, there is no air to breathe, no food to eat, no gravity to hold us on the earth, no energy to hold the atoms

in our bodies together, no air for sound and light and heat to travel through, no goodness to live in, no justice to cling to, no love to save us, and no God to create us. *We are all completely dependent on God!*

Look at Jesus' words in Matthew concerning the Father, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered*" (Matthew 10:29-30).

Think about the words of Jesus in John concerning all people, "*Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:4-5).

In the book of Colossians, Paul writes about Jesus, "*For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*" (Colossians 1:16-17).

Then Paul writes this about the Holy Spirit, "*But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Whether we know it or like it or not, we are all completely dependent on God.

The second thing to understand about our dependence on God is that even though it is true that we are completely dependent on God, we often fail to recognize our dependence on God and consequently fail to trust in God. Again, even though we are completely dependent on God, we often fail to realize this and, therefore, we also often fail to act on it. What we need is not to learn to depend on God, but to learn to recognize our dependence on God and how to trust in Him accordingly.

The following passage in Ezekiel paints a remarkable picture of this:

*"On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, 'Live!' I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels...I gave you my solemn oath and*

*entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine. I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.”*

Apart from God’s grace we are hopeless and helpless. But, thanks be to God, we are not apart from God’s grace. As followers of Jesus we can joyfully rest and rejoice in the knowledge that God formed us, blessed us, loved us, saved us, sustained us – when no one else (including ourselves) would or could. We had nothing to offer. We had no hope; no chance; nothing. Do not miss the fact that we are all completely dependent on God and should be grateful for his loving kindness, but...

*“But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. Such things should not happen, nor should they ever occur. You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them. And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them. Also the food I provided for you—the fine flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat—you offered as fragrant incense before them. That is what happened, declares the Sovereign LORD. And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough” (Ezekiel 16:4-20)?*

There are many people who outright deny that they are dependent on God (Romans 1:18-20). I suspect that many of us know someone like this. On the other hand, there are people who acknowledge their dependence on God, but choose not to trust in Him as they should (Romans 1:21). All of us fall into this category at times. Even though we can’t take our next breath without the power of God we often fail to act accordingly.

God demands and deserves that we seek Him first (Matthew 6:33). He

demands and deserves that we give Him our entire lives (Romans 12:1-2). God demands and deserves that we give Him the glory for the things that He does (1 Corinthians 10:31). Every minute of every day belongs to God. God knows the beginning from the end. God knows what is best for us, wants what's best for us, has told us what's best for us, and is willing to help us attain what's best for us. We must live like it.

## **TRUSTING GOD**

So what do we do? How do we follow Jesus by trusting in God the way that we should? Or, how do we avoid this type of disobedience? As always, there is no magic cure or secret potion. Our trust in God will grow as we continue to seek God. Learning to trust God appropriately is more about having a relationship with God than it is about a list of do's and don'ts. Nevertheless, as we seek to align our lives with God—as we seek to grow in our awareness of our dependence on God—we would do well to consider these three things:

First, we must continually remind ourselves of Scripture (Psalm 119:11). We should memorize passages from the Bible that tell of our dependence on God, the wisdom and love of God, and the things that God has done for us. Second, we must ask God to open our eyes to see what is really there (Acts 26:18). Again, we are all dependent on God; we just don't see it. We need to ask God to change that, as only He can. And third, we must wake up to our recurring blindness to this fact (Psalm 46:10). Before we act, think, or speak, we must consider the fact that we are dependent on God and consider how that should affect our actions, thoughts, or speech.

Many of us are afraid of what trusting completely in God might mean. We are afraid that we might have to give up something that we like or start doing something that we don't like. We are afraid that it might be hard or that it might not be fun. We are afraid that people will think us odd. Well, these are all things that probably will happen. If we begin, by the grace of God, to trust fully in God we will have to give up things and start doing other things. It will be difficult and it won't be fun at times. And people will definitely think us odd. Depending fully on God will cost us a lot. In fact, it will cost us everything. So, why do it? Why would anyone do this?

Because (again, as C.S. Lewis reminds us) it is like trading in a penny for a diamond. It is like trading in a Pinto for a Ferrari. It is like trading in a shack for a mansion. It is like trading in a ticket for a Gophers game for a Spartans game. We all like our pennies and Pintos and shacks and Gophers only because we don't know how much greater diamonds and Ferrari's and mansions, and Spartans are.

And we do this because if we do not trust in God we will not go to heaven. We are all sinners. The price for our sins is death—hell. We need forgiveness.

God has offered forgiveness to those who trust in Him. We must depend/trust/submit fully to God because it is the only way by which we can be saved.

Learning to depend on God is a difficult and awesome thing. Stepping out in faith – little by little – is part of an exciting and scary adventure. I look forward to taking it with you—to walking with you after Jesus, to being His disciples as we trust God together.

## **BIBLICAL EXPRESSIONS OF TRUSTING IN GOD**

I'd like to wrap this chapter up by pointing out two of the most prominent biblical expressions of our dependence on God. The first biblical way in which followers of Jesus express their dependence on, and trust in God, is through prayer.

Prayer is primarily about expressing our dependence on God by declaring God's sovereignty and empathy in all things. The simple idea of prayer is you talking to God. Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 6:5-8.

*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.”*

There are three specific truths from this short section that I want to point out. First, pray (Matthew 6:5). Verse 5 doesn't say, “if you pray” or “in case you pray” – it says, “WHEN you pray.” It is assumed that those who love God and recognize their dependence on God will pray to Him. God wants to hear from us – He wants us to pray. Prayer is nothing more than talking to God – telling Him what is on our heart and mind. We pray goofy, but that's OK. Prayer is not as much about our words as it is about our heart.

Second, our prayers are to and for God (Matthew 6:6). Verse 6 highlights the fact that there are some people who are more concerned about what others think of their prayers than what God thinks. For some people this means praying loudly and with fancy words so that others will think that they are extra holy or spiritual. And for others it means being too afraid to pray in front of anyone else because they are embarrassed. Our prayers are to and for God. Since we are talking to Him, His is the only opinion that matters.

And third, God already knows what we want, think, and need (Matthew 6:7-8). Verses 7 and 8 remind us of the fact that our prayers are not meant to keep God informed. God already knows our thoughts, wishes, desires, needs, and everything else – better than we do even (Hebrews 4:15). There is therefore no need to keep repeating ourselves or go on and on in the hopes that those things will give us a better chance of being heard by God. Instead, prayer is a chance to connect our hearts with God's. Through prayer, we open ourselves up to God and He opens Himself up to us. So when we pray we must keep in mind that God is more interested in whether or not we recognize His sovereignty (His control) and empathy (concern) in all things than He is in learning new information from us.

Prayer is a wonderful gift from God. That we can talk to God like a father in prayer, that He will hear, understand, and is able to accomplish all that He wills is a remarkable comfort to followers of Jesus...to those who recognize their complete dependence on God.

In addition to prayer, the other main way in which followers of Jesus will regularly and naturally express their dependence on God is through fasting. Fasting is primarily about expressing our dependence on God by declaring God's sufficiency in all things. That is, fasting acknowledges the unique ability of God to meet all of our needs and it is a way to fight against all the things of the world that creep into our lives and take God's place of prominence. Please turn back to Matthew 6. Again, there are three truths that I want you to see from this passage.

*“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,<sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16-18).*

First, fast (v.16a). Notice that Jesus does not say, “If you fast” or “In case you fast” or “Should you choose to fast.” Instead, He says, “When you fast.” It is assumed that those who love God and recognize their dependence on God will fast. Practically speaking, fasting means denying yourself some of the good things (usually food) that get in the way of depending on God in that way that you should.

Second, fasting is not meant to draw attention to you (vs.16b-18a). Rather, it is meant to draw your attention back to God. Fasting helps reveal the things that hinder us from wholly trusting in God and it helps break the bonds of the things that already have a hold of us.

And third, God rewards those whose fasting reflects their dependent heart (v.18b). The Bible doesn't tell us specifically what rewards that God will give us, but you can rest assured that any gift from the King will be well worth the effort!

Fasting, like prayer, is a wonderful gift from God. It was a regular part of the lives of the Israelites before Christ and the Church after Christ. It is a practice created by God to respond and draw our attention to our need for Him. That is, fasting is both an expression and a tool. It is an expression of our recognition of our complete dependence on God. And it is a tool that God has chosen to use to help us trust in Him as Jesus did.

## CONCLUSION

Followers or disciples of Jesus are growing in their recognition of their complete dependence on God and consequently their willingness to trust completely in Him. Two of the primary ways that Christians respond to our recognition of this dependence and trust in God are: prayer and fasting. Prayer is talking to God as an expression of our dependence in God and a declaration of the sovereignty and empathy of God. Fasting is denying ourselves the things that keep us from depending on the unique sufficiency of God to meet all of our needs.

The fact that following Jesus is a gift from God (from beginning to end) cannot be overstated (so I'm stating it again here)! Scripture regularly admonishes us to work (Philippians 2:12a), fight (1 Timothy 6:12), and press on (Philippians 3:14) as followers of Jesus. However, it also regularly reminds us (as this chapter points out) that our desire and ability to do what God demands comes from the power that God provides (Philippians 2:12b; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 15:5). We cannot do it on our own. We would not want to do it on our own. Take a few moments to praise God for His power, love, and mercy!

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to depend on someone or something? What kinds of things do you depend on in your life? Is it easy or difficult to depend on other people? Why?
2. Is it easy to realize that you depend on God for all things? Why or why

not? In what ways are you trusting in God? In what ways are you failing to trust in God?

3. When you pray, how do you decide what to pray for?
4. Have you ever fasted? If so, what was your experience like?
5. Spend time in prayer and make a plan to fast in the coming weeks.

## PRAYER

*Father, I depend on you for everything. And yet I forget this so often. Help me grow in my awareness of your power and of my total need for you to keep me. Teach me to pray according to your Word and your will. Help me grow in discipline so that I recognize my need for you more frequently. Thank you that you hear my prayers because of my high priest, Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit please continue to remind me to pray, remind me of my need for your provision and preservation. Amen.*

# SINCE WE ARE THE BODY

## Functioning as Part of the Body of Christ

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Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

In this chapter we are going to talk about another quality of a follower of Jesus; namely, that a disciple is a part of the body of Christ. As we continue looking at the nature of a Christ-follower we must continue reminding ourselves that it is only by the grace of God that it is possible. Scripture regularly admonishes us to work (Philippians 2:12), fight (1 Timothy 6:12), press on (Philippians 3:14), struggle (Colossians 1:29), etc. However, it also teaches us that apart from Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5). So, once again, we must, like the apostle Paul, “toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:29). And the good news is that we don’t work, fight and struggle alone; we strive in the power of the gospel together with other followers of Jesus in a local church body.

### THE BODY OF CHRIST

Let’s start by taking a look at Romans 12:4-8. From this passage (and several others) I want to point out six biblical principles.

*“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup> If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:4-8).*

The first principle that I'd like to point out is the fact that being a Christian means being a member of the body of Christ.

*"In Christ we who are many form one body..." (Romans 12:5).*

A common question that I hear from people is, "Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?" Others phrase it in the form of a statement, "I can be a Christian without going to church." It is very important to understand that, biblically speaking, this is the equivalent of asking, "Can I be a ball without being round?" Or to making the statement, "I can be water without being wet." The New Testament never uses the word "church" (*eklesia*) in reference to a building or a specific event or service. Instead, the New Testament understanding of "church" is simply the Christians in a particular area or all Christians everywhere. That is, the biblical concept of church refers to the people following Jesus together in a specific community or to all Christ-followers generally.

So, in the same way that it is goofy to ask, "Can I be a tree that isn't made out of wood?" it is goofy to ask, "Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?"

Trees are made out of wood. It doesn't make any sense to talk about a woodless tree. Christians are the Church. It doesn't make any sense to talk about churchless Christians. As a Christian, you don't go to church...YOU ARE THE CHURCH!

The second principle that I want to point out is the fact that Jesus Christ is the head of the body.

*"Christ is the head of the church, His body" (Ephesians 5:23).*

Imagine how messed up our lives would be if our hands (or feet or hearts) decided not to listen to our brains for a day. In the same way, many of the struggles within the Church today are the result of Christians refusing to listen to their head, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the head of the body. We must make sure that we recognize this, respond appropriately to this, and never try to take His place.

Third, no member of the body of Christ is more important than another.

*"If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be" (1 Corinthians 12:15-18).*

We are all different parts of the body of Christ. Whatever part of the body of Christ that God has designed you to be, it is no more important than any other part. Indeed, just like God arranged the various parts of our physical bodies just the way He wanted them, equal in value though different in role, He also arranged the various members of the body of Christ just the way He wanted them. As a Christian, you can be sure that you are exactly the right part...DON'T WISH THAT YOU WERE SOMETHING OR SOMEONE ELSE!

*“But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be” (1 Corinthians 12:18).*

Fourth, each member of the body of Christ is dependent on all the rest.

*“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be” (1 Corinthians 12:17)?*

If everyone isn't doing their part, the body won't function properly (if at all).

*As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:20-27).*

Fifth, all members of the body of Christ share certain functions.

*“Just as each of us has one body with many members...” (Romans 12:4).*

Just like our physical bodies all share certain functions (like remaining attached to one another, obeying the head, etc.), we share certain functions as members of the body of Christ. That is, as members of the body of Christ there are certain responsibilities that we all share! Again, as part of the body of Christ we must all do certain things like: pray for one another, give financially, meet regularly with one another, hold each other accountable, encourage one another, etc.

Finally, sixth, each member of the body of Christ has a specific function.

*“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (Romans 12:6).*

Imagine trying to brush your teeth with your knee or trying to think with your tongue or trying to run with your ears or trying to read with your belly button. It just won't work. In the same way, God has gifted each of us in unique ways—that is, He has given us each unique functions within the body of Christ. We

are all more naturally suited and spiritually gifted to do some things than others. When we work within our gifts we tend to excel and be a great benefit to others. When we work without our gifts we tend to struggle and drag others with us.

Please understand that God has gifted each of us, as Christians, in unique ways designed to benefit the body of Christ. Please take a moment to pray about this. Ask God to help you to see your gifts, talents, and resources and give you the desire to use them for the benefit of others.

This is where we are going to turn our attention now.

## **BENEFITING THE BODY THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD**

*“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (Romans 12:6).*

Again, each member of the body of Christ (all Christians) has a specific function or purpose within the body for the benefit of the body.

*“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).*

This is important because if every part of the body does not know and do what it was created to do the whole body will suffer. If the foot doesn't do its job, the hand will not be able to do its job as well. If the stomach isn't working properly, the heart will struggle as well. If each member of the body of Christ is not doing what God designed it to do, the rest of the body of Christ will suffer. With this in mind, I want to offer two brief reflections on following Jesus in benefiting the body through the grace God has given:

First, we must know our gifts. Paul informs us (in 1 Corinthians 12:4-5) that God has given, by the Holy Spirit, numerous gifts, services, and activities to everyone who is in Christ for the benefit of others (v.7). Peter speaks of this also (1 Peter 4:10), “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.” Once again, these passages (along with others like Romans 12:6) clearly teach that God has given all Christians certain unique blessings for the benefit of the body of Christ.

As Christians we must diligently seek out the blessings that God has given us. Scripture (in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and other places as well) lists certain gifts that God gives. However, we must understand that the scope of the blessings that God provides for the benefit of the body is much wider than what these lists contain. We must consider the whole council of God and the remarkable array of blessings in our lives as we seek to discern the unique ways that God has shaped us for the benefit of others within the body.

Some questions to ask yourself as you seek to discern the gifts of God in your life:

- In what areas of my life have I seen spiritual fruit? Or in what areas has God blessed my efforts?
- What do I enjoy doing?
- In what areas of my life do others tend to compliment me or encourage me?
- What resources do I have (time, money, energy, skill, strength, creativity, possessions, attitudes, etc.) that I could use to bless others?
- What areas of ministry do I tend to gravitate toward?
- In what areas of ministry do people tend to gravitate toward me?

Second, we must use our gifts for the benefit of the Body in the strength that God provides. The gifts that God gives us are not for our own glory. They are not primarily given that we might prosper individually. And they are certainly not given to us that they may lay dormant in us (Matthew 25). Instead, God gives us gifts to glorify him by blessing others.

Once we come to discover the gifts and blessings that God has given us we must use them liberally! We must be constantly on the lookout for how we might bless others in the name of Jesus. Indeed, as we follow Jesus in this, we will quickly realize that He offered His entire life as a blessing for others (John 3:16) and that we must do the same in the power and strength that God provides (1 Corinthians 12:6).

Some questions to consider as you seek to discern ways to use the gifts that God has given you for the benefit of the body:

- How could I use my gifts to glorify God and strengthen Grace Church today?
- What new ministry or program might God be calling me to fulfill through the exercise of my gifts at Grace?
- How might I step out in faith with one of my gifts?
- How could I give, share, teach, or use the many resources that God has given me to bless others?

## **CONCLUSION**

Following Jesus—being a disciple of Jesus—means being a part of His body. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus and as we follow Him more closely, we will find that we will also grow closer to the other Christians in our lives. There will be an increased desire to serve, give, gather, support, correct,

challenge, and pray for others. There will also be an increase in selflessness, humility, generosity, unity, charity, encouragement, interdependence, and dependence. Ask God to help you to follow Jesus in this way. Ask him to help you to see and accept your role in the body of Christ. And ask him to help you discern and use the gifts that He has given you for His glory in the benefiting the body of Christ.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your past experience with the church? What has negatively or positively affected your view of the church?
2. What ways are you tempted to avoid being part of the body? What are ways you recognize your need for the body of Christ?
3. Using the bullet points above, what are some spiritual gifts you might have or ways you could use them in the church?
4. How have you seen someone else use their gifts in the church?

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank you for saving me into your church. Help me grow in my love for your church and long for the day when all saints will gather in unending worship. Thank you for giving me gifts of the Spirit, help me to know them, develop them, and use them to build up your church. I want to be a vital part of your church, in the power of your Spirit, help me to be a vital part. May I see your glorious plan of the church and grow in my love for the people in the local church. Amen.*

# SUFFERING SERVANTS

## Suffering Persecution Through Serving Others

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The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,  
and to give His life as a ransom for many.

MATTHEW 20:28

If we are honest with ourselves we will admit that many times we are awfully self-centered. That is, most of us at our core want to be the center of things, to have others bow to our wishes, to be served. The point of this chapter is to continue our discussion on what it means to follow Jesus by looking at the fact that Jesus' followers are called to be suffering servants. Indeed, if we are to heed Jesus' call to follow Him wherever He leads and whatever it costs, we will grow in our suffering as we grow to serve others in a Christ-like way. In this chapter we are going to look first at the servant nature of Jesus.

### **SUFFERING SERVANTS**

If we are to have any hope of following Jesus in His servanthood we must quickly come to realize that virtually everything in our culture tells us that we deserve to be served. It is astounding to me how our culture has almost entirely bought into the notion that worth comes from being served rather than serving. That is, it is shocking how self-centered we are as a culture. TV commercials tell us that it is good to be spoiled and that it is right to indulge ourselves in whatever whets our appetite on a given day. Athletes tell us that being on a team means getting a bunch of guys around you to help you get paid or win your championship ring or help you look better. Musicians tell us that accumulating things is what life is all about and that we are not valuable if we do not drive this car or that boat or wear this kind of cloths or have a girlfriend who looks like that or make this amount of money. Our friends, even, often demand that we serve them as a prerequisite to their friendship.

Please step back for a minute and think about this. Isn't there something

obviously wrong with this perspective? Doesn't our conscience tell us that it is decidedly more virtuous to serve others? Isn't it right to help someone new to the neighborhood find their way around? Isn't it good to help the old lady across the street by shoveling her driveway or raking her leaves? Isn't it virtuous to give your spouse a break by cleaning the house or doing the dishes? We know that serving is good. When we stop to think, we know that being selfish is bad.

But, we often don't stop to think and so we bite the bait of our culture and before we realize it we are hooked. We look up to people because, with all of their money, or power, or good looks they can command service. We want to be like the people who are served rather than like those who serve.

Do a quick check: how often do you hear of someone who aspires to invest their life with Habitat for Humanity, Samaritans Purse, World Vision, or some other service agency? When is the last time that you praised someone else for being a servant? When is that last time that you prayed for a servant's heart for yourself? Being a servant has been all but wiped out of our vocabulary and our culture.

*"The sad thing is that a radically man-centered view of love permeates our culture and our churches. From the time they can toddle we teach our children that feeling loved means feeling made much of. We have built whole educational philosophies around this view of love—curricula, parenting skills, motivational strategies, therapeutic models, and selling techniques. Most modern people can scarcely imagine an alternative understanding of feeling loved other than feeling made much of. If you don't make much of me you are not loving me" (John Piper, God is the Gospel, p.12).*

Things weren't much different in Jesus' time. Let's take a look at Matthew 20:20-24. This passage shows three different people who felt that they deserved to be served.

*"Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something.<sup>21</sup> And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.'<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.'<sup>23</sup> He said to them, 'You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.'<sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers" (Matthew 20:20-24).*

First (v.20-21), the mother of James and John felt that she needed to be served by knowing that her sons would be in a place of prominence in heaven. Perhaps you are like the mother of James and John. Maybe you want to be served by

being associated with the success of others. Second (v.21-22), James and John felt that they needed to be served by being given a place of prominence in heaven. Perhaps you are like James and John themselves. Maybe you feel that you deserve to be served by others. Finally (v.24), third, the rest of the disciples felt that they needed to be served by not being placed below James and John in heaven. Perhaps you are like the rest of the disciples. Maybe you feel the need to be served by pulling others down. Again, whichever group we can most closely relate to, whatever form it takes, our natural desire is often to be served rather than to serve.

Here's where we need the Word of God to change us. Virtually everything in the Bible tells us that we *deserve to serve*. Please note the radical contrast between the world and the Word. The world tells us to be served. The Word tells us to serve. Indeed, in stark contrast to the words of James and John's mom, James and John, and the rest of the disciples, read Jesus' words.

*“But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).*

In this passage Jesus tells us that we should want to be great (v.26). Jesus says, “whoever wants to be great... whoever wants to be first.” The assumption is that we should want to be great and that we should want to be first. That is, it is important to note here that Jesus does not tell us not to want greatness or firstness. He does not scold those who desire to be great or first. Rather, He simply tells us that our understanding of greatness and firstness is off.

The world wants a fake greatness—greatness through being served. Again, Jesus says, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them...” This is not the way it should be. This is not true greatness or firstness. Indeed, demanding that others serve us, Jesus tells us, is the exact opposite of greatness and firstness.

Christians want true greatness—greatness through serving. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” Being great and being first, according to the standard of God, means being a slave and being a servant. It means putting others first. I means looking to the needs of others in the same way that you look to your own. If we want to be great and if we want to be first (and we should), we must be servants.

Jesus demonstrated this true greatness with His entire life, and death. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” Jesus gave us the perfect example of being a servant. His entire life He chose to live a peasant’s life even though He was, and is, the King of the universe. He could have ruled all with complete authority. Instead He chose to live a lowly carpenter’s life. And instead of ending it by claiming His rightful throne, He ended His life by dying a sinner’s death on the cross.

Again, unlike our culture, unlike the rest of the world, Christians are to see greatness in Jesus’ example of serving rather than being served. Disciples or followers of Jesus constantly look to meet the needs of others. As followers of Jesus we must imitate His greatness and firstness by imitating His servanthood. We must always look for ways to serve others. We must be proactive about seeking out and acting on ways to serve. Don’t wait for a Grace Church “service project”; go out and serve. Don’t wait for someone else to lead you into serving others, you lead!

Consider this partial list of people the Bible tells us to be especially mindful of: Orphans (James 1:27), widows (James 1:27), our neighbors (Luke 10:29-42), social outcasts (Luke 10:29-42), the hurt (Luke 10:29-42), the hungry (Matthew 25), the thirsty (Matthew 25), those in prison (Matthew 25), the lonely (Matthew 25), the sick (Matthew 25), the needy (Matthew 25), those who hate you (Luke 6:28), etc.

Serving others is not normal in our culture. Sadly, serving others is not even normal in most churches. We must be culture changers! We must follow Jesus so closely that His sweat is our sweat, His bruises are our bruises, His scars are our scars. I challenge you, according to the standard of God, to go for it. Get outside of yourselves, trust in the power of God, and serve! Ask God to give you this kind of heart and this kind of life. Ask Him to give you the wisdom, will, and strength to live as a true servant of the King.

## **SUFFERING SERVANTS**

Now we are going to turn our attention to the outcome that Jesus promises to everyone who serves in this manner. Can you imagine what He is going to say? When we serve others in this sacrificial way we should expect applause and recognition, right? We can expect the praise of men and the blessing of others, right? Quite the contrary. Jesus promises that everyone who serves in this way will suffer. *“As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:19).*

Before we get too far however, it is important to note that there is a biblical distinction between suffering and persecution. According to scripture, suffering

simply means experiencing discomfort. Sometimes it's physical, sometimes it's emotional, and sometimes it's spiritual. Sometimes suffering results from our sinful choices, sometimes it results from our righteous choices, and sometimes we have no idea why it happens to us. For the most part, suffering is presented in the Bible as unchosen. Christian persecution on the other hand is always presented as the result of choosing to follow Jesus in an environment that is hostile to Jesus. In other words, suffering can happen to anyone, in any way, for any number of reasons. Persecution, though, only happens to Christians because they are acting Christianly. All Christian persecution, therefore, is suffering, but not all Christian suffering is persecution.

This is not to say that, generally speaking, people cannot be persecuted for all kinds of reasons. Rather, it is to say that while the Bible addresses Christians suffering in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, it addresses Christian persecution in a variety of ways but for only one reason: following Jesus closely. In other words, being a Christian doesn't necessarily mean that you will get cancer or suffer from depression or have a terrible marriage. It does necessarily mean, however, that people will be bothered by the choices you make as a follower of Jesus. When I say that we are called to be suffering servants, I primarily have persecution in mind. I have chosen to use the word "suffering" simply to make it easier to remember.

We don't have to dig very deeply into ourselves to realize that the idea of suffering in any form (including persecution) does not bode well with us. In fact, most of us go to great lengths to avoid suffering altogether. Virtually everything in us tends to want to avoid suffering. We have things like comfort zones and standards of living and social programs designed to minimize—if not completely eradicate—suffering from our lives.

How then are we to embrace the calling of Jesus to follow Him into one of the worst kinds of suffering: persecution? There are two parts to this question.

First, does Jesus really call us to suffer? And second, why would we listen? That is, why would we respond to a call to be persecuted?

Does Jesus really call us to suffer? Take a look at John 15:18-21. I want you to notice three things about this passage:

*"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on*

*account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me” (John 15:18-21).*

First (v.19), following Jesus means being of another world. Simply put, when we begin to follow Jesus (become a Christian), we are born again. That is, we are adopted into a new family—the family of God—and our true citizenship is now heaven rather than earth. We must, therefore, obey the rules and customs of our true home over (heaven) above our temporary place of residence (earth). In a very real sense, then, following Jesus means being of another world!

Second (v.19), the people of this world hate, and therefore persecute, people who are not of this world. Jesus says, “This is why the world hates you” and “If they persecuted me [which they obviously did, even to the point of death on the cross], they will persecute you also.” Jesus, here, promises that everyone whose true citizenship is heaven will suffer through persecution.

Third (v.20-21), persecution ultimately results from the fact that persecutors do not know God. Again, true followers of Jesus will be persecuted because their persecutors don’t recognize the authority of our ruler—God. This is important because it means that we should not be angry at them, but at Satan for blinding them so that that cannot see God. In other words, when someone persecutes you for following Jesus, don’t grow in anger or bitterness towards them. Instead, pray that God would shine His light into their darkness and allow them to come to know Him!

So, the answer to the first part of our question is: “most definitely, yes.” Jesus promises us that everyone who truly follows Him (has Him as their master) will be hated and persecuted. This is important to know before you decide to follow Jesus. You need to know what you are getting yourself into. This is important to know after deciding to follow Jesus. The amount of persecution that you receive because of your faith is often a good gauge as to how closely or how well you are following Jesus.

This leaves us with our last question, “Why would anyone follow Jesus into His persecution?”

It’s amazing to me how much we are willing to do and how far we are willing to go to get (or keep) something valuable to us! How many people have lost their lives trying to summit Everest? How many people have lost their families in the pursuit of riches? How many people have made a mess of everything trying to get the next high? We are all willing to go to amazing lengths (endure great suffering) to get or keep something valuable to us. What this means, then, is that the answer to the question of “why would anyone follow Jesus into His persecution,” is because Jesus is supremely valuable to them. That’s ultimately

what we are talking about here: how valuable is Jesus to you?

God has put something in each of us that allows us to rise above our sinful, *de facto*, tendency to avoid persecution when we find something valuable enough. Since being a Christian means recognizing that God is the most valuable thing in the universe, Christians are able and willing to follow Jesus into persecution. Again, if we come to see Him as He truly is, infinitely glorious, then no amount of suffering or persecution will keep us from following Him. Jesus is all that there is! What else is worth living for!? What could we gain from following someone or something other than Jesus that could even compare to Jesus!?

The apostle Paul words it this way, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (*Philippians 1:21*).

On the other hand, if Jesus is just one more thing in our lives, we are likely willing to follow Him right up to the point of persecution, but no further. For many, Jesus is fine as long as it doesn't cost us any popularity or free time or physical comfort. Once following Jesus leads to these kinds of things many quickly pull back. But this is not the perspective of a true Christ-follower! Just listen to Scripture's perspective on following Jesus.

*“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul“ (Mark 8:36)?*

*“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).*

*“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26).*

Again, the real question and application for here is, “How valuable is Jesus to you?” and “How does your life reflect it?” Following Jesus means being a bit reckless in sharing the Gospel. It means taking risks in obeying His Word. It means looking foolish and even being hated because you are dressing, talking, thinking, and acting differently than the rest of the world. It means that to live is gain and to die is Christ. It means that Jesus is more valuable than your money, your reputation, your family and friends, your job, your health, and even your very life.

## CONCLUSION

This is what it means to follow Jesus! It will lead to a life of suffering servanthood, but it will lead to an eternity of sweet fellowship with this wonderful, beautiful, marvelous, majestic, awesome, infinitely glorious Jesus! Follow Jesus. Follow Him!

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your first thought when you hear the word 'suffering'? What things cause that reaction?
2. How does looking at Jesus' life, death, and resurrection change our view of suffering?
3. What are some things that bring you comfort? What makes it hard to give up some of our comforts for the sake of the gospel?
4. Think of one way you could serve someone in your family or at Grace Church in the next week.

## PRAYER

*King Jesus, I can't imagine the amount of suffering you joyfully endured for our sake. Conform me to your image that I would be prepared and willing to suffer for your sake. Change my ideas of greatness to match your definition. Change my priorities to match yours. Help me to serve others and not worry about my glory but yours alone. Help me to grow in my love for you and not care what might happen to me. Amen.*

# GROWING IN GODLINESS

Taking on the Character of Jesus

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Train yourself for godliness; for...godliness is of value in every way.

1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

In this chapter we are going to continue our discussion on what it means to be a follower of Jesus by looking at the fact that His followers are called to follow Him in godliness! Much of this chapter was inspired by Jerry Bridges' book, *The Practice of Godliness*.

## GROWING IN GODLINESS

1 Timothy 4:7-8 says, "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

In essence, 1 Timothy 4:7-8 is a command for all Christ-followers to pursue something called godliness. This is not an option. This is not a suggestion. This is a command for everyone who calls on the name of Jesus to actively pursue godliness! Godliness, as Jerry Bridges describes it, "conveys the idea of a personal attitude towards God that results in actions that are pleasing to God." The important thing to note here is that godliness is not simply a list of things to do. Rather, godliness is a particular kind of life that results from a particular attitude towards God.

Our tendency is to take a look at a list and then begin trying to check off each of the items on it...be good: check...act fairly: check...love people: check...fight sin: check...etc. True godliness however goes much deeper. Again, at the heart of true godliness is a certain attitude towards, or perspective on, God and our relationship with Him. The attitude towards God that we are to have is (again as Jerry Bridges points out) one of desire for, fear of, and love of God.

If our lives are to grow in godliness, our hearts must grow in desire for, fear of, and love of God.

Desiring God (Psalm 84:2) means that, more than the stuff He can do for us, we want God Himself. Do you truly desire/long for/yearn for God? Is there a desire for more than His helping hand?

Loving God (Deuteronomy 6:5) means truly desiring what is best for God. Do you want, more than anything, to see God receive His rightful place of honor and glory?

Fearing God (Deuteronomy 6:2) means truly grasping the fact that He would be completely just in smiting every one of us for the sins that we have committed, but chooses not to only because of His good pleasure. Do you stand in awe at the fact that God has forgiven you? Does the thought of God's power cause you to tremble? Does the consideration of your sin cause you great disgust?

Only when our attitude is right before God can we begin to grow in godliness. Please pray and ask God for the kind of attitude that is conducive to growing in the kind of character that He calls us to.

With this in mind, it is important to briefly look at some of the characteristics/actions of godliness. Among the actions pleasing to God that result from this attitude of love, fear, and desire are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, humility, contentment, thankfulness, holiness, justice, truthfulness, and mercy.

**Love** – One growing in godliness is growing in her desire to see what is best in the lives of others. Do you truly want what is best for the people around you? What are you willing to sacrifice to get it for them? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Joy** – One growing in godliness is growing in his joy in the person and works and people of God. While there is a seriousness or sternness to life on earth, do you find a growing joy? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Peace/Contentment** – One growing in godliness is growing in her contentment with the situation that God has placed her in. While we constantly long for things to be as they will be in heaven, do you find yourself satisfied with the place and the things and the people that God has surrounded you with? Are you slow to anger? Do you seek unity? Do you try to overcome conflict? Do you always have to have the newest, fastest stuff? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Patience** - One growing in godliness is growing in his willingness to wait on the Lord. Do you recognize that God's timing is better than yours? Are you steadily growing in your ability to trust in God's timing? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Kindness** - One growing in godliness is growing in her affinity towards others. Do you find yourself wanting to help others? Do you find others wanting to be around you more? Do you find yourself making sacrifices for others? Do you find yourself wanting others to succeed? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Goodness** - One growing in godliness is growing in his desire and ability to do right. Do you find yourself wanting to do good things? Do you see yourself growing in your desire to think what God wants you to think, do what God wants you to do, feel what God wants you to feel, and be what God wants you to be? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Faithfulness/Truthfulness** - One growing in godliness is growing in her understanding of truth and obedience to it. Do you find yourself searching for truth? Do you find yourself growing in your commitment to living according to truth? Are you growing in your commitment to keeping your word? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Gentleness** - One growing in godliness is growing in his ability to treat others with compassion and gentleness. Are you becoming gentler? Do you tend to turn people off because of gruffness or callousness? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Self-Control** - One growing in godliness is growing in her ability to control her own body. Are you growing in your ability to live a life of discipline? Are you growing in your ability to make your body do what you want it to do? Do you often find yourself just going with the flow? (Galatians 5:22-23)

**Humility** - One growing in godliness is growing in his understanding that we are all equally unworthy before God. Are you growing in your recognition of the fact that everything that we have is from God and that therefore we have nothing to brag about? Are you growing in your ability to see others as more valuable than yourself? Do you tend to look down on others? (Philippians 2:3, Micah 6:8)

**Thankfulness** - One growing in godliness is growing in her gratitude for the blessings of God? Are you growing in your thankfulness for all that God has done for you? Do you find yourself more and more thankful for the people in your life and the blessings that they give you? Do you feel that you deserve the blessings that you have? (Psalm 100:4-5)

**Holiness** - One growing in godliness is growing in his ability to keep from sinning. Do you find yourself hating sin more and more? Do you find yourself better able to fight off and kill sin? Do you find yourself better able to resist temptation? Do you find yourself better able to stay away from situations that might tempt you? (Hebrews 12:14)

**Justice** - One growing in godliness is growing in her desire for fairness. Do you find yourself increasingly frustrated at the unfairness around you? Do you find yourself working to eliminate unfairness? Are you growing in your desire and ability to treat others justly/fairly? (Micah 6:8)

**Mercy** - One growing in godliness is growing in his ability to give grace. Do you tend to treat others according to law or grace? Are you quick to forgive? Do you tend to focus on the ways that people have wronged you? How does the idea of forgiving someone several times for the same offense sit with you? (Micah 6:8)

## **GROWING IN GODLINESS**

So, now that we have a grasp on the nature of godliness, how do we go about growing in it? One of my favorite verses is John 15:5. In this passage Jesus makes it plain that apart from Him we can do nothing. It does not say that we can do very little apart from Him. It does not say that we can do almost nothing apart from Him. It says that we can do absolutely nothing apart from Him.

In other words, if we desire to grow in godliness we must cling to Jesus. We must love Him, fear Him, and desire Him. We must beg Him to give us the will and the strength and the courage to do what He wants us to do and to be what He wants us to be. Growing in godliness, like all aspects of being a disciple, requires the hand of God. It is God's grace that allows us to come to the cross and to begin following Jesus. It is also God's grace that allows us to continue following Jesus, follow Him more closely, and to keep following even when it is difficult.

Growing in godliness also requires intentionality, discipline, and sacrifice. First Timothy 4:7b says, "...train yourself to be godly...." Training ourselves to be godly requires intentionality, discipline, and sacrifice. We must intentionally go after godliness. It will not happen on accident. We must be disciplined in our pursuit of godliness. This means that going after godliness requires resolve, commitment, and strength. We will be forced to make sacrifices in our pursuit of godliness. Growing in godliness means giving up certain things. It means taking a harder path. It means going against the current.

I want to wrap up by offering a few practical suggestions on how to grow in each of the areas of godliness that we have covered. I recommend picking two or three areas that you would like to begin growing in and focus on those first. As you begin, pray fervently. Ask God to work them out in you. Spend time with older, mature Christians and take note of what godliness looks like in them. Find out what God's Word says about them. Memorize relevant

passages. And, obey God.

## LOVE

- God is what is best for all people. Spend time with God. Talk to Him regularly (prayer). Read His Word often (the Bible). Fall in love with what is best so that you can truly want Him for, and share Him with, others.
- Look for ways to bring God to people (serving, helping, praying, etc.).

## JOY

- Spend time combing scripture for descriptions of who God is and what He has already done.
- Spend time combing scripture for all of the promises of God for Christians.
- Spend time combing scripture for all of the things that are true and will be true of Christians.
- Spend time combing scripture for all the commands of God. Obey them.

## PEACE/CONTENTMENT

- Consider the simple, humble life of Jesus.
- Consider what Jesus endured on the cross in silence.

## PATIENCE AND SELF-CONTROL

- Consider the wisdom of God.
- Commit to waiting at least a week before getting the things that you want.
- Make a list of your areas of weakness. Make no provision for the flesh.

## KINDNESS

- Be nice to people. Look for creative ways to encourage and praise others.
- Find someone to serve.

## FAITHFULNESS/TRUTHFULNESS

- Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Study hard.
- Check yourself by writing down everything that you say you will do and then checking it off as you do it.

## HUMILITY

- Do things that you are not good at.
- Spend time around people who are better at certain things than you.
- Consider the greatness of God.

## THANKFULNESS

- Reflect on the fact that everything that you have come from God.
- Consider all of the ways that God has provided for you.

## HOLINESS AND GOODNESS

- Keep a list of your sins each day for a week.
- Read about the various encounters with God in the Bible.
- Consider the greatness of God.

## JUSTICE

- Intentionally imagine walking in the shoes of others (in your home, at your school, around the world).
- Consider how God slaughtered His Son, Jesus, to maintain His justice.

## MERCY AND GENTLENESS

- Spend time with the most vulnerable in your community (the sick, helpless, poor, orphans, widows, etc.).
- Get to know someone who is truly suffering.

## CONCLUSION

I imagine that those reading these pages fall into one of three categories:

There is a group that cannot imagine following Jesus in this way. Before you can follow Jesus in this way (or any way), you must go to the cross. You must acknowledge your sinfulness before the holy God. You must cry out to Him for forgiveness. You must turn from your sins and embrace all that God is and has for you in Jesus Christ. When you do this, God will be faithful and just and He will forgive your sins, wash away all unrighteousness, and lead you on the path of His Son, Jesus. Then, and only then, will the thought of fighting for, and training in, godliness be the cry of your heart.

There is another group that likes the idea of following Jesus in this way but has convinced themselves that they are doing fine in this already. Fight this! Fight this with all that you have. This is one of the most dangerous places in which you can be. This is what Jesus called “lukewarm.” You are in jeopardy of being spit out of Jesus’ mouth.

Finally, there is a third group that feels a Holy Spirit burden to flee from any remaining desires of worldliness and pursue godliness at all costs. Praise God for this! Praise God that He has given you such a gift. Embrace it. And go for it!

As followers of Jesus we must pursue godly character. However, godly character only comes from a godly attitude. We must all therefore plead with God to give us this kind of attitude—one of love, fear, and desire. Then, as we begin to see the seeds of this God-pleasing attitude spring up within us we must begin to fight, with all that we have, for the actions consistent with it.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which group from the conclusion would you fall into? A) I could never imagine following Jesus in that way B) I’m doing fine already or C) I have a burden to pursue godliness at all costs.
2. When you look at the list of godly characteristics, what stands out to you as things you possess? What are some areas you need to grow?
3. If we aren’t saved by our godliness, why do we need to pursue godliness?
4. Can you point to an area of your life where you have seen growth in godliness?

## PRAYER

*Father God, I have no godliness apart from Christ. But now, in the power of the Holy Spirit, please help me to grow in godliness. Help me bear fruit so that others will see more of Jesus when they look at me. You have promised to sanctify me completely, help me to do my part and believe that you will surely do it. Amen.*

## Seven

# WE HAVE A DEBT TO PAY

Debtor and Lover of People

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I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,  
both to the wise and to the foolish.

ROMANS 1:14

In this final chapter we are going to take a look at a seventh quality of a disciple: Disciples are grace debtors. Specifically, we are going to look at how we got into debt, who we are indebted to, and how we can make payments on our debt.

## 2000 YEARS AGO

Nearly 2000 years ago Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross to pay for the sins of all who would repent, believe, and love Him. Since then, beginning with his closest followers, the disciples, thousands and thousands of men and women have died for telling people about this ultimate sacrifice and amazing grace. Please consider the fate of those who first followed Jesus: every single disciple (save Judas), and countless others, were martyred for their faith. Indeed, hundreds and thousands have followed the example of the disciples in choosing death rather than silence concerning the life, death, and saving work of Jesus. The questions before us are: “why would the first followers of Jesus chose death rather than silence?”, “what does this have to do with me?”, and “what does following Jesus have to do with telling others about Jesus?”

## WE ARE DEBTORS

I believe that Paul, as well as anyone, understood the answers to these questions. His answer begins with the simple truth that everything in all of creation is like trash compared to the glorious grace of God. Listen to his words in Philippians 3:8, *“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered*

*the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...*” Paul understood that accepting the grace of Jesus (to be forgiven and free) to heed the call of Jesus (“follow Me”) is the most obvious choice in the universe. He understood that no matter the cost, the benefit of the Gospel is infinitely greater.

The second part of Paul’s answer is found in Romans 1:14. In this passage Paul calls himself a debtor. That is, Paul claims that he owes someone something.

We find out from v.5 that his debt is not one of money or labor, but of grace! Indeed, Paul teaches, when we accept God’s grace (the death of Jesus as payment to the Father for the forgiveness of our sins and the sustaining work of the Holy Spirit in our lives) we become debtors of grace. Again, Paul is claiming that he, along with everyone under the saving grace of God, owes grace.

The next aspect of Paul’s answer is, perhaps, a bit unexpected. Unlike conventional debt, where the debt is repaid to the one providing the capital, Paul informs us that we must pay back our grace debt, not to God, but to everyone around us. Paul says, *“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.”* That is, Paul understood himself to be indebted to *everyone* because of “the grace he received” (v.5).

Again, when we come to realize the infinite gloriousness of God and the amazing grace that He offers, the choice to accept that offer is irresistible. Then, having received grace from God, we become grace debtors, not to God, but to everyone else. We make grace payments by sharing God’s grace (the Gospel) with others. We must be indiscriminate in our payments. Our debt is infinite and therefore we must never stop making payments on it; not in order to earn God’s favor, but because we already have it. Indeed, this means that all followers of Jesus must be grace sprinklers. No one should be able to get near us without getting sprayed with grace!

This brings us back to our questions: “why would the first followers of Jesus chose death rather than silence?”, “what does this have to do with me?”, and “what does following Jesus have to do with telling others about Jesus?”

The first followers of Jesus chose death rather than silence because, having seen the gloriousness of God and accepting the amazing grace of God, they became debtors of grace; owing the grace of God (the Gospel) to everyone. They died, joyfully, rather than default on their debt!

Concerning us, today, this is still the case. Following Jesus means that we have accepted the grace of God and therefore owe the grace of God; not to God, but to others. John Piper words it this way, “So when grace comes to us from God

in the gospel, it comes to pay our debts that we have to him. Grace does not make you a debtor to God; but it does make you a debtor to others who need grace just as you did.”

Piper also warns us sternly from failing to make grace payments: “So if you hold this grace back from others as if you are qualified and they are not, you default on your debt to the world and prove that you have not really known grace. Grace is precious beyond words. It is our only hope as sinners. We don’t deserve it from God. And no one can deserve it from us. When it comes to us freely, we are debtors to give freely.”

It is by grace through faith that we follow Jesus. And it is because of the grace that we have received (but didn’t deserve) that we must give grace to everyone else (believers and non-believers). We must follow Jesus wherever He leads and whatever it costs. We don’t have to follow Him far into the Gospels before he leads us in giving grace. And we don’t have to follow Him far before it costs Him His life to do it!

## **REFLECTIONS ON GRACE PAYMENTS**

The chapter on the body of Christ speaks to making grace payments to Christians. As we engage in making grace payments (perhaps at the cost of our very lives) to non-Christians, we would do well to keep in mind the following eight biblical truths:

### **1. THERE ARE PLACES WHERE THE GLORY OF GOD IS NOT CHERISHED AND LOVE FOR GOD IS ABSENT.**

The reality here is that all of us who have seen the glory of God and have fallen in love with the glorious God understand that there is nothing in the entire universe greater than God. Nothing in all of creation (no amount of toys or money or sex or health or success) compares to knowing God in His glory. Those of us who have tasted and seen the goodness of the glory of God in the face of Christ know that it is the only thing that can truly and eternally satisfy our souls.

Nehemiah 9 (left) reminds us that this (knowing the love and glory of God), above all things, compels us to reflect the glory of God (make grace payments) by displaying our satisfaction in God, and speaking the Good News about God, to everyone, everywhere.

Indeed, this joyfully drives us even to the ends of the earth. This is cry and fuel of missions. To withhold this Great News, especially from those who would not otherwise have access to it, would be one of the most unloving – indeed cruel – things imaginable.

## **2. THE KIND OF GRACE AND LOVE THAT GOD GIVES TO ALL CHRISTIANS EXTENDS FROM THE CHRISTIAN'S SOUL TO THE SOUL OF THE NON-CHRISTIAN.**

God commands us to love Him with all that we have and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Have you ever stopped to wonder how we can obey the second half of this command if we truly obey the first half? In other words, if we love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength (indeed, with everything), then what is left to love our neighbor or ourselves? The answer is, according to 2 Corinthians 5:14-16 (left), we love them by the grace of God with the love that God returns to us – God's love, Christ's love.

When we love God in the way that He commands us to love Him, He returns to us a supernatural, a divine, love that compels us to reach out to those around us with the good news that they too can be saved. The cost won't matter, the potential danger won't matter, and our busy schedules won't matter. If we truly love God then we will truly love His lost children and we will be willing to go to great lengths to bring them home.

## **3. APART FROM RECEIVING AND ACCEPTING GOD'S GRACE ALL ARE CONDEMNED TO HELL.**

This reality should shock and overwhelm us. This reality should bring chills to our spines, aches to our hearts, and tears to our eyes. The thought that millions of people die every day sentenced to an eternity in hell should cause us no small amount of anguish.

The knowledge that we possess as Christians concerning the eternal punishment of all those who die apart from Christ must grieve our hearts and prepare us for action. The knowledge that we possess as Christians concerning the eternal bliss of all those who die in Christ (having received and accepted the Gospel) must awaken our spirits and compel us to action (Romans 1:16-20, left).

## **4. THOSE MAKING GRACE PAYMENTS HAVE BEAUTIFUL FEET.**

I vividly remember watching a friend embrace another woman in San Jose, Costa Rica who had just accepted Christ. I remember Magella tearfully thanking my friend over and over for bringing the Good News to her that Jesus would forgive her sins. This is what Romans 10:15 means when it claims that those making grace payments have beautiful feet. It means loving God and the lost so much that we are willing to go to them with the good news. Following Jesus in His willingness to pay the ultimate price (His very life), that others might repent and believe, gives us beautiful feet.

## **5. JESUS COMMANDED IT.**

It doesn't get any simpler than this. As we see in Matthew 18:18-20 and Acts 1:8, Jesus commands us to engage in making grace payments (making disciples and being His witnesses). Like fighting against sin, being a part of the Church, studying the Bible, not murdering, etc., we are to tell others about Jesus. This is not an optional part of the Christian life.

## **6. THE APOSTLES MODELED IT.**

When Jesus commanded His followers to tell others about Him they understood what He meant. We get a clear picture of this when we read the account of their ministries in the Bible. Consider Luke 10:1-3 where Jesus sends seventy-two Christians out to make grace payments. As we consider the place of evangelism in our own lives and ministries (as well as the ministry of our church) we can't help but to be humbled by its place in the lives and ministries of Jesus first followers (and in the early Church).

## **7. GOD GROWS US THROUGH IT**

I have shared the gospel with many people since becoming a Christian. Sometimes I have shared with boldness. Sometimes I have shared in great fear.

Sometimes I was looking for the opportunity to tell someone else. Sometimes God has smacked me upside the head with one. However, even though the circumstances surrounding my attempts to speak the Gospel to others have varied, one thing has remained constant: God has changed me with every evangelistic encounter. God uses faithfulness in making grace payments to grow, stretch, challenge, and change our faith, often times in profound ways.

Consider how the evangelism efforts of Luke 10:1-3 ended up. Consider the response of the first Christians as they returned from telling others about Jesus.

*“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’” (Luke 10:1-9, 17-20).*

It is amazing to watch God work in (not to mention through) the hearts of individuals as they follow Him in bringing grace to the nations—drawing them into deeper communion with Himself.

## **8. GOD PROMISES TO REWARD AND PROTECT AND PROVIDE FOR**

## **THOSE WHO TRUST AND OBEY HIM.**

When it comes to obeying God everything else must take a back seat. We must echo the words of Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15 KJV). In other words, even though obeying God might cause us great physical harm or expense or comfort we must still trust and obey. Thus, when forced to choose between being practical and being obedient, we must always choose obedience.

However, while God does not guarantee that our efforts will be free from short term struggle (in fact, He guarantees the opposite – that they will often bring us great struggle), He does guarantee that any short term struggle will be more than repaid in the life to come.

*“Peter answered him, ‘We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?’ Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life’” (Matthew 19:27-29).*

Our grace payments must not be hindered by the cares of this world (money and health and family and...). Rather, they must be fueled by care for the next and an understanding that God will reward faithfulness with eternal bliss, protect the faithful heart from falling away from grace, and provide for the faithful servant by atoning for his or her sins.

## **CONCLUSION**

We can see that there are many reasons to tell others about Jesus (we owe it to them, it is our joy, God commanded it, people need it, God grows us through it, etc.). And we can see that because of these reasons (and others), making grace payments has everything to do with our lives, if we are to truly follow Jesus as His disciples.

Please consider the amazing God and amazing grace that led all 12 disciples to die telling rather than default on their debt. Please consider the amazing God and amazing grace that has led thousands to do the same sense. Please consider the grace that you received from God. And please consider all those around you who are not yet under the saving grace of God.

Then ask God to give you a faith like the martyred saints, a deep, deep understanding of the grace that you have received, and a broken heart for others. Ask God to give you a love for the people around you that would

compel you to action. Go for it. Recklessly, radically, boldly, intentionally, lovingly, delightfully, unceasingly, unashamedly, indiscriminately, passionately, tell others about the good news that they can be saved and remain saved by the grace of God!

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Tell the story of how you heard the gospel and believed? Who were the people and circumstances involved? What was said that made you believe?
2. What are some things that are scary about sharing the gospel with others?

3. What are some ways that you can gain confidence to share the gospel?
4. Write down 3 names of people you know who need to hear the gospel. Pray for these three people and ask God to help give you chances to share the gospel with them.

## PRAYER

*Jesus, I believe in the gospel. Help me overcome my unbelief. Cause my heart to break over people who don't know you. Give me courage and boldness to share the gospel with the lost. Increase my love for you that flows into love for others. Give me the urgency to speak to people. Amen.*

# Summary

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate a few things:

## **FOLLOWING JESUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN GOD'S CALL.**

The heart of Christianity is now, always was, and always will be, a call to follow Jesus. Throughout redemptive history, throughout God's interaction with man, the call has been the same: Follow Me. The wording changes throughout Scripture, but the essence stays the same: Follow Me.

## **FOLLOWING JESUS BEGINS AT THE CROSS.**

If you don't recognize that you are sinful—that you have fallen short of the glory of God; if you don't truly grieve over your sin; if you don't recognize that your sin has a death penalty attached to it; if you don't accept, by faith, Jesus' death on the cross as payment for your sins, then any attempt to follow Jesus will be in vain.

Many people have tried to start following Jesus by going to Bible studies or going to church or singing songs or praying or helping out or struggling with sin or even by telling others about Jesus. However, just like someone who tries to jump in at the middle of a race, these people will all be disqualified (Matthew 7:22-23).

We must begin at the cross!

You can come to the cross no matter what you have done (Matthew 11:28). You cannot be so bad that Jesus will not forgive you at the cross (Luke 7:47). In order to come to the cross you do not need to clean yourself up (Matthew 9:12). At the cross you will be embraced by the loving arms of Jesus (John 3:16). When you come to the cross Jesus will lift your burdens from you (Matthew 11:29-30). By His death on the cross Jesus brings forgiveness and eternal life to all who cry out to Him (Isaiah 53:5).

## **AT THE CROSS JESUS FORGIVES OUR SINS AND BEGINS TO MAKE US MORE LIKE HIM.**

That is, at the cross we follow Jesus into reconciliation with the Father and He begins to work in us a right understanding of God and His Word (2 Timothy

3:16), proper love and worship of God (Matthew 22:37-38), a recognition of our dependence on God (John 15:5), the realization that we are a part of the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5), the calling on our lives to be suffering servants (Matthew 20:25-28; John 15:20), godliness (1 Timothy 4:8), and a recognition of our indebtedness to others (Romans 1:14).

**FOLLOWING JESUS IS ONLY POSSIBLE BY SOME MYSTERIOUS COMBINATION OF OUR GREAT EFFORT AND THE GREATER POWER AND GRACE OF GOD.**

Once again, as passages like Philippians 2:12-13 teach us, following Jesus is only possible by some mysterious combination of our great effort and the greater power and grace of God. And it is only by this mysterious combination that we will want and be able to be the kind of person God calls us to be and do the kinds of things God calls us to do.

In other words, we will never be able to be a disciple of Jesus unless we go for it with all that we have while trusting in God to provide the necessary will and strength. If we leave out either aspect of this strange, divinely ordained combination we will always fail.

Please make no mistake about the fact that the cost of following Jesus is great. The path that Jesus intends to lead us down is wrought with danger and hardship. Following Jesus, as we have mentioned, will mean suffering persecution, trouble, nakedness, and sword (Romans 8:35). Following Jesus means denying yourself (Matthew 16:24). Following Jesus means dying to this world (Romans 8:13).

But please make no mistake about the fact that the result of following Jesus is greater still. Heaven, the final destination of all true Christ-followers, is the place where God uses all of His might to bless those in His presence forever. Every moment, when we think that it could not possibly get any better, it does...on and on and on for eternity. In heaven, there is no more sin, no more sadness, no more suffering, no more tears, no more difficulty, and no more trials. All of these things are replaced by the infinite, eternal, and unveiled glory of God. Wave after wave after wave of God's glory will wash over us for ever and ever.

There you have it. That wraps up our best attempt at describing what it means to follow Jesus and our most passionate plea for you to follow Him. Let's go for it. Let's, by the power and grace of God, fix our eyes on the Author and Perfector of our faith. Let's come alongside one another, lock arms, and follow, by faith, the King of Glory. Amen.



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