Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

An Introduction to Discipleship – Week 44

Living the life of Jesus

Day 301. Service

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct he should show his works done in the gentleness that wisdom brings. … The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and not hypocritical. And the fruit that consists of righteousness is planted in peace among those who make peace. James 3:13, 17-18
Be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it ... one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does. If someone thinks he is religious yet does not bridle his tongue, his religion is futile. Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their adversity and to keep oneself unstained by the world.
James 1:22, 25-27

You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:13-14
Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.
Matthew 10:8

Who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. Luke 22:27
Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first a mong you must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:26-28
If your *enemy* is hungry, give him food to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink…
Proverbs 25:21
Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you Matthew 5:44

I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me. Matthew 25:40.
It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35

Christian service puts faith into action – in a very real sense, it is a form of worship. Pursuing discipleship of Jesus provides us a greater understanding of the depth of Christian service. Jesus served every person, whether He admonished them or not. He put faith into action by showing all those around him how our Heavenly Father is compassionate, courageous, and forgiving. Jesus didn't just talk about His faith; He lived it.

Service may be in grand acts of charity and sacrifice, but is usually in daily, comparatively small acts of service done in devotion to Christ. Christian service is to "do something!" as Jesus would have done.

Our acts of service are done to mirror the life of Jesus and the love of God, and they have the goal of bringing Christ to those we serve and glorifying His name.

While you are doing an act of service, talk to Jesus – thank Him for being with you, ask that it truly be a blessing for those you are serving, and that it does indeed glorify Him. Try to see Jesus in the person you are helping. Practice loving everyone in this way.

Share your experience with those you trust.

Day 302: Confession

If a man lies carnally with a woman… they shall not be put to death… But he shall bring a guilt offering for himself to the Lord… And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the Lord for his sin which he has committed; and the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him. Leviticus 19:20-22

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20:21-23

So then, if you bring your gift to the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your gift. Matthew 5:23-24

And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up—and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness. James 5:14-17

Jesus was very familiar with the practice of offerings to atone for sin and with confessing to receive forgiveness. The Anglican church has two practices of confession:

1.) Corporate Confession, found on pages 45-46 (The Penitential Rite, intended for use with the Daily Office), or on page 191 (Holy Eucharist)
2.) Individual Confession (*The Reconciliation of a Penitent,* found on page 166 of the Book of Alternative Services).

As the preamble states:
The ministry of reconciliation, committed by Christ to his Church, is exercised through the care of Christians for each other, through the common prayer of Christians assembled for public worship, and through the priesthood of the Church and its ministers declaring absolution.

Confession is important because it releases us from what is holding us down – if we bottle up the evil that we do (intentionally or not), it preys on our spirit and can debilitate or even totally overwhelm and incapacitate. Confessing is liberating and life-giving. Receiving one's confession seriously, jointly discerning if further actions are warranted (atoning reparations, for example), and then extending forgiveness as appropriate are holy and life-giving ministries. The church takes this ministry so seriously that it decided centuries ago that the Priest, as a specially trained person, should be the one to discern this with the confessing person (today, most people go to a psychologist). However, this does not remove the capability of each of us to extend forgiveness if it is appropriate for us to do so. Like all disciplines, daily self-examination and confession to God (and others *as appropriate* – there is inappropriate confession as well! Make sure you are not "confessing" just to bring attention to yourself) is healthy and life-giving.

Is there anything you are holding which would be healthy for you to confess? Offer it up to Christ, and ask others for forgiveness as appropriate.

Share with your thoughts fellow explorers.

Day 303: Forgiveness

Forgiveness is key to living the Life of Christ. It is a critical discipline of following Christ.

Jesus said, "forgive us as we forgive" (The Lord's Prayer)
"If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14).
Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, and from now on do not sin any more." (John 8:11)
And finally, when He was on the cross,
"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

We forgive because God has forgiven us – anything we need to forgive others for is miniscule compared to what God has forgiven us for, even as far as if they take our lives! The forgiveness we extend is for events which happen in our earthly lives, while God's forgiveness is for our eternal lives.

I can imagine Jesus laughing when He responded to Peter's question:
Peter came to (Jesus) and said, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times! (Matthew 18:21-22)

Though He may have laughed, He was underlying a serious point: never-ending forgiveness is to be the underlying approach of His followers (note that this is NOT acceptance – forgiveness and acceptance are not the same thing). He has granted His followers the power which He had, which was given to Him by the Father:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven."
(Matthew 16:19)

If we choose to bind someone (and ourselves) by not forgiving them, that will be taken up at some point with our Father in heaven for review. However, if we release them (and ourselves) by forgiving them, then they are released by our Father in heaven. Forgiveness is serious business, for it is love in action.

What do you need to forgive yourself of? What would be healthy to forgive someone else of? Is there something you can't forgive? Why?

Share with your Father in heaven.

Day 304: Worship

Hold on here – I've been listening and absorbing all of this – but how is worship *a discipline?*

Great question! What is the typical pattern of church worship which is most widely known?

Weekly worship on Sunday.

Yes. Are there other times of worship encouraged?

Daily Morning and Evening Prayer.

Do you think the participants always feel like worshiping?

No. I know I don't!

Therefore, worship is a discipline – a code of behaviour you follow regardless of your emotions.

I thought in worship we're supposed to praise and glorify, with joy and gratitude?

Yes, we are.

So, don't they involve our emotions?

They do. However, it is a very common misconception that our emotions drive us.

But they do!

They can. But they don't have to. It is always a choice if we obey our emotions or not.

You're telling me that we are to, daily or weekly, praise and glorify, express thanks and gratitude, whether we feel grateful or not?

Yes. Gratitude is a decision, not an emotion.

What about joy?

Joy?

You know: a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. Note the word, "feeling."

I'd like to quote https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/insight-therapy/201010/action-creates-emotion:
"Many people assume that the link between emotion and behavior is one-way: Emotions shape behavior. You love him, therefore you kiss him. You hate him, therefore you hit him. This view

is incorrect. In fact, the relationship is reciprocal. Much of the time, behavior actually shapes emotion."

How we are feeling if often dependent upon what we are doing. If we intentionally do something harmful, we may feel guilty. If we intentionally do something loving, we may feel joy. In the discipline of worship, we offer our praise, gratitude (we even explicitly say those words), regardless of how we feel.

So, what's the point then?

Worship has two great benefits:

1.) It gives God great pleasure when people honestly revere Him. If we say we are grateful to God and we honestly know something that we are grateful to God for, even if we don't "feel" gratitude, God receives that with pleasure. In worship, we offer something loving to God.
2.) The fact of offering joy and gratitude gives the participants joy and gratitude. If you get used to regular worship, you may find that, when you skip a worship feeling, you are emotionally missing something – a sense of connection, an uplifting, even … a sense of joy or gratitude. As Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is infinitely more blessed to give worship than to receive it.

Worship was one of the most-emphasized ancient disciplines. Many Christian monastic communities followed "The Rule of Benedict", which stipulated structured prayer seven times a day (*Nocturns* in the very early morning (around 2:30 a.m. or so) followed by *Lauds* before dawn, *Prime* at six in the morning, *Terce* in mid-morning, *Sext* before noon, *Vespers* in the evening, and *Compline* before retiring for the day). The Anglican Book of Common Prayer compressed the first six into Morning and Evening Prayer (this was viewed as more practical for the daily life of everyday people as opposed to those living in monastic communities) and kept Compline as an optional bed-time prayer.

Try worshiping God every day – you may find it helpful to keep a journal of how your emotions are affected after you worship versus when you don't.

Share your thoughts with your fellow disciples.

Day 305: Celebration

Here I'm going to quote from https://renovare.org/articles/understanding-celebration by Richard J. Foster:

The spiritual discipline of celebration leads us into a perpetual jubilee of the Spirit. We are rejoicing in the goodness and the greatness of God. As Saint Augustine said, "The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot."[1]

Celebration comes to us as the result of all the spiritual disciplines having done their work in our lives. The desired goal of the spiritual disciplines is to produce in us a deep character formation. The fruit of the Spirit is the "holy habits" of a truly formed life. In greater and deeper measure our life is being penetrated throughout by "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."[2]

This deep-rooted character formation brings balance to our lives. Anger, bitterness, resentment, rancor, hostility, deceit — these things simply do not have the same control over us that they once did. We feel the impact of this in all our relationships: with our spouse, with our children, with our co-workers, with our neighbors, with our friends. Even with our enemies.

When the substance of our life is formed and conformed and transformed into Christlikeness, then celebration becomes possible. No longer do we undermine or sabotage the good work of God. We can simply and joyfully celebrate the goodness of God in us and in those around us. Celebration is made possible as the common ventures of life are redeemed.

Joy is at the heart of celebration. Indeed, I rather imagine it's the engine that keeps the entire operation going. "The joy of the LORD is your strength," declared Nehemiah.[3] *And so it is. Without joy penetrating all the disciplines, they will quickly deteriorate into another set of soul-killing legalisms.*

Perhaps the most important benefit of celebration is that it saves us from taking ourselves too seriously. It is an occupational hazard of devout folk to become stuffy bores. Celebration delivers us from such a fate. It adds a note of gaiety, festivity, and hilarity to our lives.

Celebration gives us perspective on ourselves. We are not nearly as important as we often think we are, and celebration has a way of bringing us the needed balance. The high and the mighty and the weak and the lowly all celebrate together. Who can be high or low at the festival of God? Together the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless all share in the goodness of God. There is no leveler of caste systems like festivity.

Celebration is not just an attitude but also something that we do. We laugh. We sing. We dance. We play. The psalmist described the joy-filled celebration of the people of God complete with timbrel and dance, with trumpet and lute and harp, with strings and pipe and loud clashing cymbals. In celebration we celebrate! Celebration is one of those things that does not diminish with use. Rather it multiplies. Celebration begets more celebration. Joy begets more joy.

Laughter begets more laughter. I have found that times of genuine celebration have the potential of bringing healing and wholeness to the entire community. So … let's celebrate!

1. Saint Augustine quoted in Eugene H. Peterson, *God's Message for Each Day: Wisdom from the Word of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 227. ↩
2. Galatians 5:22 – 23 ↩
3. Nehemiah 8:10 ↩

(Foster, Nathan. *The Making of an Ordinary Saint: My Journey from Frustration to Joy with the Spiritual Disciplines*. Baker Publishing Group.

For each chapter in Nathan's book, Richard Foster writes an introductory essay — like this one from the chapter on Celebration.)

Review the disciplines that we've covered – if you haven't done any, pick one and try it. Take small steps, but be persistent – slowly and steadily, moment by moment, day by day, practice one discipline, then a second, until you're finally doing all of them. You'll be following the practices which Jesus knew and followed – as you do that, each and every day, more and more you'll become like Him – which, if you have no other reason, is a great reason to celebrate. God bless you.

Share your experience as you desire.

Day 306: Reading Scripture (part two! ☺)

As we've said many times, the Bible is our foundational document – so, a key discipline is to know the bible and let it form us. As well as the daily discipline of *Lectio Divina*, where we let the Bible form how we live our lives and seek to understand it with all our heart, it is important to seek to understand the bible with all our mind.

We shared earlier about reading the bible on the surface and below the surface (through the eyes of Christ). An early church theologian named Origen stated there were three ways to read scripture (literal, moral, and spiritual), while a later theologian named Augustine of Hippo stated four:

1. The first is the literal interpretation of the events.
2. The second connects the events of the Old Testament with the New Testament; in particular drawing allegorical connections between the events of Christ's life with the stories of the Old Testament.
3. The third is moral, how one should act in the present.
4. The fourth type of interpretation is dealing with future events such as heaven, hell, and the last judgment.

Thus, the four types of interpretation deal with history, belief, actions, and destiny. For example, with the Sermon on the Mount:

- a literal interpretation is that Jesus went to a hill and preached;
- an allegorical interpretation is that Jesus is a new (improved) Moses the Lawgiver, delivering commandments from a mountain;
- a moral interpretation is to do what Christ said (be peacemakers etc.);
- a future interpretation is that Christ was prophesying his own death, setting its interpretation (persecuted, with mourners, but peacemaking, etc.) with the promise of eventual blessing through the New Kingdom.

All this is to say that there are many ways to interpret scripture, many ways to understand it – and it is fruitful to embark upon them, as long as we don't hold to that we have the "right" interpretation and everyone else has the "wrong" one! Rather, interpret to build up your understanding of, and relationship with, God. Starting next week, we shall study the bible in a fair bit of detail.

Pick a small section of scripture – write out each of the four types of interpretation you could apply to it below:

Share your findings with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 307: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.