The Disciple Challenge
The Formation

- We have made it to week 3 of this series on Discipleship, called The Disciple Challenge! I really wanted to get back to the simplicity of the Gospel in this series. But in that simplicity reminding us of the challenge of discipleship built into it. I wanted us to realign ourselves with the basic disciplines of discipleship, of following Jesus. Reminding ourselves what it truly means. And it doesn't matter how long you've been following Jesus, no matter how long you've been in this it's easy to drift from the foundational things, the beginning things.

- Last week we reminded ourselves of the 4 Pillars of a Disciple's Foundation and let me tell you: those pillars never change or shift the longer you follow Jesus those are ALWAYS the foundation. Those are it! No matter how long you've followed Jesus these 4 things never stop! They were The habit of Scripture, which you will never outgrow! It's your daily bread! The habit of prayer, the habit of worship, and the habit of community. Those things are the foundation of a disciple!

- Today we are going to go a little bit deeper. Last week was the foundation today is the formation. As we get deeper I can't stress those four pillars enough! We cannot have the deep things of Christ if we are not practicing the foundational things of Christ. We need the foundation to build anything else. But today we are going to build some. These aren't super deep these are still foundational essentials but a little deeper than last week. They help us have spiritual formation. You got your foundation set well from there you practice spiritual formation. And some of you may be wondering what I mean by that so let me give you a definition…

<u>Spiritual Formation Definition:</u> The lifelong process of The Holy Spirit shaping your inner life so that you think, desire, and live more like Jesus

- This is not about trying harder it is about surrendering deeper. This is about daily making Christ unmistakably seen in your life. So many of us don't doubt God's power or presence but where we so often tend to lack is this department. We have issues take the information we know and translated it to a life that is surrendered and reflecting who we know: Jesus. We know the scripture and the trivia but is it actually bearing fruit in our lives? We can listen to all the podcasts, the sermons, take all the notes but the question isn't how much do you know it is: Is the likeness of Christ being formed in you?

- In Galatians we see Paul talking to the church of Galatia, who is experiencing a formation problem themselves and he says this in verse 19…

Galatians 4:19: "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives." NLT

- In this translation it uses the word developed in others it uses the word: Formed. But it means for Christ to be shaped, be molded, or developed like it says here in the NLT. But it shows something about Formation: Formation is not fast, it is slow, it is intentional, it is uncomfortable, it is a process The Holy Spirit does inside of you. God is shaping your inner life until Jesus recognizable in the way you think, act, speak, and feel. It's not about just knowing Jesus but becoming like Jesus.

- If you have ever wondered: What is God's Will for my life? I will give you one verse, it's one sentence and it very clearly says God's Will for your life, for every life:

Romans 8:29: "For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." NLT

- Let me read this verse this time from the Amplified Bible:

Romans 8:29: "For those whom He foreknew [and loved and chose beforehand], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son [and ultimately share in His complete sanctification], so that He would be the firstborn [the most beloved and honored] among many believers." AMP

- God set up a destiny for us long before we took our first breath and it was formation, a fancy Bibley word for it is: Sanctification, it simply means we were destined to look like Jesus! That is God's Will for each and every one of us! God doesn't want you to look like me, God doesn't even want you to be your "best self" He wants you to reflect and look like Jesus! We are to be the image of God The Son to our broken, hurting world! This is God's eternal Will for all of us!

- I know we want to think God is here and His Will should be for our circumstances to change but above changing your circumstances He wants to change your character so you can be a testimony of His Goodness through your circumstances!

2 Corinthians 3:18: "So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." NLT

- We like to think of Sanctification, or Formation as a one time event but according to this verse we are becoming more and more like Him as we chase after Christ. So that means the longer we serve God the more and more we get to look more and more like Him! No matter how long you've been at it there is still more growth for you! And the beauty is we don't have to brute force it! It doesn't come from trying harder the transformation comes from God! So The Holy Spirit does the transformation that means all we have to do is yield to The Holy Spirit!

- We live in a culture that is drowning with information but we never see the formation! Just because we heard it doesn't mean we have it. Before we get into the habits we need to make that allow God to Form Us and Sanctify us I think we need to understand maybe some reasons we struggle with letting God form us. What is the struggle? What is keeping us from this? There are probably so many reasons I could give but this morning I just want to give a few…

We Rush Past God's Pace

- Maybe it's just me and I'm the only impatient one in the room but I know of many instances in my life where I got ahead of God due to my lack of being able to wait or move slowly. I mean it's become the culture of America everything and everyone is just in such a hurry! We have Fast Food, Instant Downloads, Same Day Delivery, and I think without realizing it we let that pace creep into our spiritual lives. We want instant Holiness! We want drive-through discipleship! Microwave Spiritual Maturity! Can I tell you: ***Spiritual Formation does not happen at the speed of your wifi!***

- It actually happens at the speed of relationship, and relationships take time to build and grow. We live in a word where speed is celebrated, faster is always better. I mean what is better than two day shipping? I will tell you: one day shipping. And what is better than that? Same day shipping! Thank you Amazon! We love quick answers and if we are honest it's easy to allow the speed of culture into our walk with God.

But we cannot have spiritual maturity without the process to get it!

Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" NKJV

- Being still is so hard! And being still is so countercultural! When is our world still? It is always moving, but yet we are asked to do this! Psalm 46 is actually a wartime Psalm so this was during a battle and what this phrase here: "Be still" it actually means stop fighting. It's saying lay down your weapons and trust God! The world tells us when we face chaos or tough times we are supposed to fight harder, push harder, but God says be still.

- God calls us to purely trust Him, even when His timing is different than the pace we want Him to match. The strategy to victory in God is never fighting or trying to fix the thing it is surrendering completely and trusting Him. God won't shout over the noise in our life that is competing for Him. God will wait for your life to be quiet enough to hear His voice. If you never slow down, you may achieve a lot for God but miss out on what He wants to grow in you. A second reason maybe we miss out on formation is…

We Work For God Without Walking With God

- We can get so caught up in serving, leading, this one is especially hard for Pastors, I'll be transparent there are certainly times I've experienced this, and we are doing for God and producing for Him but forget the whole point is to just simply be with Him. That's the whole point of all of this. Our relationship is not transactional it's relational!

John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." NIV

- Apart from God we don't produce fruit. It's not apart from Him we can do some fruit just less, it's nothing without God. We can't allow our schedules to get so busy we are missing out on Him and His presence! The spiritual reality is when you are disconnected from Christ, you can produce impressive looking things but never anointed fruit bearing things. You can be impressive without bearing fruit without creating things that are eternal. We cannot allow ourselves to be empty on the inside, we need to be filled and constantly in the presence of God!

- Doing is never the assignment, His presence is always the assignment. Before being a Pastor I am called to be a child who is close to His Heavenly Father. I was created for closeness with God not productivity for God. I love to do for God but I need to love to be with Him more! ***The assignment of a Disciple's***

life is the presence of God! And it's not that doing is bad but it's not the priority, the priority is His presence and from His presence He will bear fruit in us and through us! Another reason I think we often struggle with formation is…

We Mirror The World More Than We Reflect The Word

- One of the biggest tragedies in any Christian life is if you look at the way someone thinks, speaks, and lives and they look just like the world around them. We should look different! The values and culture of the world has slowly crept it's way into the life of a Disciple and the Church in general. It comes sneakily through entertainment, through politics, through success, relationships, it comes from everywhere and what happens is we end up being more shaped and formed by culture than by The Word of God!

- We end up having more fruit from our televisions and social media we consume than the sermons we hear, and the verses we read! We cannot be mirrors that reflect the world around us!

Romans 12:2: "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." NLT

- Other translations use the word "conform" and to be conformed actually means to be pushed and pressed into a mold. The world around us is always pressing, always pressuring, and trying shove you into the mold it wants you to be! To look like the customs and habits of our world's culture. How you think about money, relationships, success, identity, truth, the world is trying to mold the way you think about all the things! If you aren't intentionally trying to push against culture you will subconsciously be conformed to it!

- I like to use the escalators or moving sidewalk platforms at airports as an example. Those moving sidewalks are my favorite thing. I can be lazy and let it move me or I can move with it and be The Flash for like 50 feet on my way to the plane, so fun! But the world is like them. The world is constantly, never stopping, moving in a direction. It is the opposite direction God wants us to move. And being a Christian means we are walking against the tide, the movement. And we have to push and it takes effort. And the second we stop moving against the platform it takes us backwards the opposite way. That's what the world will do to you!

- We are to live transformed and that happens by daily renewing our mind! Letting God and His Word shape and form our minds! God wants to transform you! And not a surface level change but a radical one! The world wants to squeeze you into it's shape and mold. But God wants to use His Written Word to transform you into the image of Christ! 1 John chapter 2 warns us…

1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. 16 For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. 17 And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever." NLT

- We cannot love the world, and this verse isn't talking about people. We love the lost people of this world. But it means love the culture, systems, and values of this world. We were all created to be mirrors, we were created as mirrors to reflect the glory of God. But when we turn to the things of this world that is when we reflect this decaying culture and not the never ending Glory of Jesus! The longer you stare at the things of this world the more you look like the world. But the opposite is true: the longer we are in The Word of God the more we will reflect it!

- Let me give you another obstacle that keeps us from formation, and these obstacles are so real! If it was the easiest thing ever than everyone would act and look like Jesus but the reality is formation, sanctification can be difficult! But let me give you this last one…

We Run From The Valleys That Could Transform Us

- Sometimes we run for dear life from the valleys that God wants to use to transform us! I think a lot of us get spiritually conditioned to avoid discomfort at all cost. We think it can't be God's will when I don't like it! It's human nature, why would we want something that makes us uncomfortable? I can prove it too. Silly example but I almost guarantee whenever any of us go to the grocery store we all pick the shortest line possible. We don't want to wait, waiting is uncomfortable! We put a destination in our GPS we put in the fastest route, never the scenic long out of your way one.

- And spiritually we tend to try and pray away every situation that feels like pain, that feels like loss, feels uncomfortable, that feels like stretching, uncertainty. And because of that we have made our faith see the valleys like detours or

delays to God's plan rather than the roads He is guiding us to and through in His plans for us! And the problem with that is when we keep trying to avoid the valleys we will always avoid the transformation and growth that actually only comes from the valleys.

God does some of His deepest and most profound work in places and situations we would never ever choose for ourselves. Which means when we do everything to run from the valleys of life we are running from the hands of our Great Shepherd who is trying to shape and form us!

- David knew this very well and thats why he wrote Psalm chapter 23. He knew a good shepherd doesn't just lead us to good pastures and still waters but also through the deepest darkest valleys as well. You may not like that part of the journey of faith, that God actually moves and works on us in the valleys and uses the valleys for His Good and Perfect Will and Plans. But we need to understand this!

- I don't want any of you spiritually checking out in the hard seasons that God actually wants to form the deepest work inside of you. Too often we try to pray away the thing God is using to take us through for our development and our character. Let's go through Psalm 23, it's a beautiful Psalm, one that is read at almost every funeral for some reason. Not sure of that, it's not a funeral Psalm I think it's a formation Psalm, a Psalm of spiritual maturing and growth…

Psalm 23:1-3: "The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake." NIV

- Let me tell you with The Lord as our shepherd, we truly lack nothing. It's not because I have everything I want it's because I'm being guided by the One I need! And sometimes God has to make me lie down and rest. He leads me on the right paths of life! And then we get to verse 4 and beautiful verse that is a shift we just got through testifying about God's guidance but His guidance and direction takes us even into and through valleys, and dark ones too!

Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." NIV

- This translation says the darkest valley but some translations are even more intense and say "the valley of the shadow of death" how is a valley like that apart of God's right path? Well maybe God is after something different than we are. Maybe when we are wanting better circumstances God actually wants to

build His character in us through this darkest valley. Transformation can't just happen on the mountain tops of life. The mountain tops we get to experience the Goodness of God but in the valleys we get to experience the true Presence of God! Faith gets personal in the valleys of life. Let's read some more of this Psalm…

Psalm 23:5-6: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." NIV

- I love this, victory isn't our enemies disappearing it's God providing and feeding us in the presence of our enemies. God's love runs after us, follows us always and through it all! The bible is very clear all throughout it, not just in this Psalm, that valleys aren't actually detours they are divine assignments where God can form us and do a great work of transformation and sanctification in us! It's not in the good times on the mountain, it's in the pressure, the fire, the valley. That means we don't to run from the hard moments and deep valleys but trust God through them!

- When we try to avoid the valleys of life we end up with ***Shallow Spiritual Roots!*** Roots have to push and dig down deep and require pressure in the soil. If we keep running from the pressure, from the pain, and then we end up like the seed in the Parable of Mark chapter 4. A seed that has no roots and when hard things hit we struggle with our faith tremendously. We need spiritual roots and the valleys of life will prove how deep our roots are!

- God uses the valleys of our life and when we refuse to give up, we persevere our roots grow deeper. Our spiritual maturity grows. Our formation gets deeper and our testimony gets louder! Avoiding and running from valleys and pain has bad consequences for a disciple! And when we skip the valleys we start to look at God as a product and we turn into ***Spiritual Consumers.*** We find our faith becoming solely about what we can get and all the pains we can avoid.

- We have to always ask ourselves am I here for what God gives me and shields me from or for Who He is? ***The valleys and formation in them remind us we are not customers of Christ we are Disciples of Christ!***

- In order to experience this kind of Formation or Sanctification that is refined even in the hard moments of life we need consistent and intentional Spiritual Patterns in our lives. They are the practices and habits of a disciple. Disciples

need spiritual rhythms that help us be formed by Christ. This morning I want to share with you ***4 Disciplines That Form And Shape Your Inner Life.***

1.) <u>Fasting</u>- Loosening The Grip of The Flesh

- We need to bring back this completely normal but powerful Spiritual Habit or Pattern of Fasting. Biblical fasting less about saying no to food and more about saying Yes to God.

<u>Matthew 6:16-18: "And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. 17 But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. 18 Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you." NLT</u>

- It was never a question of will you but rather a when you do and He says take care of yourself, don't make it obvious because you want attention, fasting is for your relationship with God not to score pity points from those around you. If you are wondering when to fast in scripture it often was before a huge decision, or you are in a time of repentance from something that happened, or you just need to bolster your faith in Christ, but I can be anytime. Maybe you feel the Holy Spirit prompting you to fast and surrender your flesh to God for a time.

- God wants to speak to you and fasting clear the static of life so you can better tune in to what He is trying to speak to you. And fasting can be fully giving up food or it can be giving up something that is a distraction for you. Fasting unplugs you from the noisy world so you can better listen to what God is trying to speak to you. It is removing distraction so you can purely be chasing The Lord!

No matter what you fast it is simply about emptying your flesh so you can fill up your spirit.

2.) <u>Solitude</u>- Meeting God Without Distractions

- Talk about an important practice that we so often forget and is so countercultural, we need quiet time with the Lord, we need solitude with God! We have to take time to eliminate all distractions and spend time just being with God in His presence. I am pretty sure our world today is allergic to

silence. And I'm just as bad with it. Every extended time of quiet just feels awkward. I am so bad with awkward silence, I want to fill all the space and use all my words because silence is weird. If there are gaps I want them filled! And it's not just with conversation, it's life.

- When there is a moment of silence or solitude how often do we then start to scroll on our phones? We can't just sit, we need constant noise and entertainment. Playlists, text messages, scrolling, emails, we carry the noisy world in our pockets on our phones. And then we wonder why we can never hear God speak to us? We are so distracted! God didn't stop speaking we've just gotten too distracted to listen! In Hebrew there is a word for this it's…

Chashah(Hebrew)-To be silent, to be still, to hold peace, to be inactive

- So solitude for God is not just the absence of noise it is being intentional to lower the volume of the world so we as disciples can actually tune in to the voice our The Shepherd. Even Jesus did it.

Mark 1:35: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." NIV

- Jesus picked the morning because it was before the demands, the noise, Jesus was strategic. I'm not saying you have to pray in the morning but find a time when you aren't in demand when you can have solitude and stillness in God. Silence and solitude can be a challenge, it can feel uncomfortable, awkward. I understand! When the noise dies down so often we get bombarded with unfiltered or unprocessed thoughts, our hidden fears and worries, but we need to be willing to fight through our own thoughts and noise to hear the voice of God and spend time in His peace.

Psalm 62:1: "I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him." NLT

- True rest comes when we choose to take time and be quiet before God, have solitude with God. We need the time and place to do that! It's vital! We need to quiet down the noise of life enough to spend time with God and allow His voice and presence to disciple and shape us! And just a reminder, your phone isn't allowed in your solitude time with God!

3.) Sabbath- Trusting God Enough To Stop

- Another simple yet difficult discipline of a disciple of Jesus. Trusting God enough to take a day and just stop. We live in a world that glorifies the hustle,

the side gigs. Having job after job after job after job and never stopping to rest in God. We measure our worth in productivity. The truth is the need to have constant motion in our life is a symptom that shows we actually don't trust God with our life. Sabbath is God's remedy to the idol of self reliance. It is the weekly reminder that the world keeps spinning without you and the way to truly rest and be closer to God.

- I promise you aren't the glue holding the world together you can have a day of rest. God's got it! We can stop and God will still be God! Sabbath isn't just taking a break from work it is a declaration of trust that God can handle this! God's got me! This fourth commandment of the Ten Commandment so often get's overlooked!

<u>Exodus 20:8-9A: ""Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work…" NIV</u>

- Now The New Testament, the New Covenant after Jesus died and rose again for us eliminated the need for sabbath to be Friday night through Saturday night now it can be any day but we still need sabbath! Sabbath is a 24 hour period where you stop work and you worship God and rest and just delight in God. It's not a catch up day on chores it is a day for resting in God's presence! It is a day set apart for spiritual, emotional, mental renewal and revitalization.

- Sabbath is an invitation from God for not just rest from physical labor but from the soul strain of trying to prove yourself. It's not just a day off but a day to remember God loves and cherishes you not because of your works but because He is that Good! ***I think a good Sabbath is comprised of these five things: stop working, rest your body(take that nap), replenish your soul, refresh your relationships, rejoice in God's Goodness.***

4.) <u>Spirit Led Living</u>- Walking In Step With The Spirit

- We need to walk in step with The Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is our daily guide and our steps should be guided and led by God's Spirit! The Spirit is not and should not just be doctrine we believe but the way we live and the power we follow and rely on. We need to invite The Holy Spirit to set the pace of our life. Spirit led living isn't just saying a prayer for God to bless what you already planned to do.

- It is taking a step back a moment to ask God, what did you want to do in me and through me today Lord? And then here is the kicker: actually do it! If The

Holy Spirit isn't setting the pace we may end up running the wrong direction at full speed ahead!

Galatians 5:25: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." NIV

- The Holy Spirit has a pace and a direction and I want us all to be in step to be in sync with Him. It reminds me of marching band, I marched and the challenge for the band wasn't playing and moving, it was playing and moving in sync with one another. Being in step together. That same challenge can be hard for us in daily life when we want to be Spirit led. We need to let the Holy Spirit set the pace and direction and then get into step and move in sync.

- If God slows we slow down, if He moves faster we match the speed. If He waiting then guess what? So are you.

Romans 8:14: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." NLT

- We can't be led by a voice we don't listen to. We must listen and follow, God will lead us! He will lead us as He forms us!