

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

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Resources for Christ-Centered Discipleship

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Preface

In the Scriptures there are at least seven significant facets of discipleship that can help us to assess our spiritual growth and keep us on course as we follow Christ. All of the resources for Christ-centered disciple making published by Christ Community Church are designed to develop one or more of the following seven core facets for Christ-centered discipleship.

1. Focused on God
2. Fulfilled in Christ
3. Biblically integrated
4. Growth oriented
5. Ministry-minded
6. Committed to the church
7. Devoted to disciple-making

The three chapters in this booklet were first delivered as sermons by Pastor Larry Kirk at Christ Community Church, Daytona Beach, Florida. They outline and introduce these seven facets of authentic discipleship and their relationship to each other.

1 “How To Make The Most Of The Rest Of Your Life”

Part 1: The Upward Look

We only get one life. We might wish for more. D.H. Lawrence was kind of wishing out loud when he said: “If only one could have two lives. The first in which to make one’s mistakes ... and the second in which to profit by them.”

Of course, Jesus Christ told us that we do not get another life in which to learn from this life’s mistakes. There is no rehearsal. We have one life to live and this is it. I think most of us want to make the most of our lives.

The Bible assures us that God wants us to make the most of our lives as well.

We do not get another life in which to learn from the mistakes in this life but what we can have, through faith in Christ, is the grace of God that forgives our failures. We need to know that the same grace of God that forgives our sins also empowers us to make the most of the rest of our lives.

But how do we do that? How do we make the most of the rest of our lives?

This is one of three messages that address that question and tie into our focus on spiritual growth. We've stressed this year that no matter where you are in your spiritual life there is always a next step to take. But the first step, of course, is to find the right path. No matter how many "next steps" you take, they will not move you toward the right goal unless you are on the right path. What Christ clearly taught in his life and ministry is that there is really only one true path to freedom and fulfillment in life. That path is the path of discipleship.

THE WAY TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IS TO MAKE A SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Do you know what the essence of discipleship is?

There is a fascinating story in the Bible that shows us. It's the story of the calling of Simon Peter to be a disciple of Jesus. One day Jesus was with Peter after Peter had spent the whole night working hard but catching nothing. It was the day after this fruitless night of fishing that Jesus had just finished teaching when he turned to Peter and said: "*Put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch.*"

The moment that Jesus made that statement the outcome of the story hangs in the balance. The question at that moment is this: Will Peter do what Jesus tells him to do? There are what appear to be good reasons not to. Peter is a life-long, experienced and successful fisherman. Jesus is not. Peter had worked hard all night and caught nothing. Will he do what Jesus tells him to do in spite of what he may think or feel about it? Peter said: "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*"

There are six especially significant words in Luke 5:5 " because you say so, I will" Peter said: "*Lord, I will do what you tell me to do.*" " because you say so, I will"

Do you know what happened? Luke 5:6 says: "*When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.*" Peter made the catch of his life. If you read the whole story you would see that their nets began to break. They called other boats over and all the boats began to sink under the weight of the catch!

At the end of the story of what happened that day Luke says: So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. Whenever I read that story, it hits me again how much the whole story points to the path we need to take in life.

There is a lesson in that story. The story did not end with these men buying bigger boats and bigger nets and persuading Jesus to join them in the family business. The end of the story is that they pulled their boats up on the shore and left everything to follow Jesus. They realized that the power of Jesus was not something they could harness for selfish purposes. It was a power and greatness before which they could only bow in humility and submission as they committed themselves to follow him.

The point of the story is that Jesus is an absolutely reliable guide to direct us in any and every area of life. We can know that when he tells us what to do -- even if what he tells us to do doesn't make sense to us -- we can do what he says with confidence in Him.

In the Bible there is a special word that is used for a life in which you choose, like Peter, to follow Christ in faith and obedience. It's called "discipleship." A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ.

The Essence of Discipleship is Following Christ.

"*Follow me*" was the first and last thing he said to Peter. It's the heart of his message to you as well. The essential thing in making the most of the rest of your life is to simply be, in truth, a follower of Jesus Christ. At the heart of all true discipleship is a person not a program. A disciple is a person who says to Jesus Christ, without conditions or negotiations: "I will follow you."

We talk a lot about taking the next step spiritually but there is no use taking the next step if you aren't going the right way. If you are not following Christ then the next step is to turn around and take the step of commitment to following him.

Some people who claim to be Christians act as if Jesus Christ exist for the purpose of following them. They've got their plans, ambitions, agendas, and they expect Christ to come along following them and blessing it all. Jesus Christ is gracious. He gives good gifts to his people and blesses our lives because He is generous. But the way to make the most of your life is not to go your own way hoping Christ will bless you, but to turn around and follow him wherever he chooses to lead you.

In a great little book titled *Following Christ*, Joseph Stowell writes: The follower's journey is simple in the sense that the complexity of life is reduced to the single question, "Where is Christ on this issue?" Or, put another way, "Am I on the road with him." While all the world loses itself in speculation and experimentation about the meaning of life, the follower has a certain singular focus: Christ.... Amid the tension of a dozen voices telling us what to do and how to live, His is the one voice that captures the attention of our hearts. (Stowell, "Following Christ" p. 22)

To people who are weary of working to achieve goals that only leave them empty, to people who are tired of ending up addicted and enslaved to the things that they thought were going to set them free, Jesus offers a better life. We say, "help me" and He says, "*follow me.*"

The essence of discipleship is following Christ. We need to know that. We also need to know that there are certain aspects or facets of discipleship that stand out in the Scripture. We need to know them as well. As individuals and families, it's our purpose to be disciples. As a church it's our purpose to make disciples. How do we identify where we are weak, where we are strong and where we need to take the next step?

The Bible helps us with this. In the Scriptures there are seven significant facets of discipleship that can help us to assess our growth and keep on course as we follow Christ.

The Facets of Discipleship are Seven-Fold.

1. ***A disciple of Jesus is focused on God.*** A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to living all of life for the glory of God. It's not about you, if you are a disciple of Jesus. You follow him; he doesn't follow you. Like Jesus, you say: "Father my desire is to glorify your name." 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

2. ***A disciple of Jesus is fulfilled in Christ.*** A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to finding spiritual fulfillment in a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 6:35, Jesus declared, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.* A disciple of Jesus isn't chasing fulfillment in this world. He or she is finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

3. ***A disciple of Jesus is biblically integrated.*** A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to knowing God's Word and applying it to every aspect of life. The risen and living Christ actively speaks to his followers not only by His Spirit but preeminently in his Word, the Bible. Those who follow him are learning how to apply the wisdom of his Word to every facet of daily life. Our work life, home life, relationships and ambitions are all brought under the light of his word. In John 8:31-32, Jesus said, *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* A disciple of Jesus wants to know the Scriptures in depth and apply them in life.

4. ***A disciple of Jesus is growth oriented.*** A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to ongoing spiritual growth. Jesus once said that when you are fully trained as a disciple you become like your master. A disciple of Jesus is

committed to becoming more and more like Christ through the power of his indwelling Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 3:18 says: *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.* To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a person devoted to change. You're not perfect, not by far, but you are growing more like Christ. You make the effort to address the issues in your life prayerfully and spiritually. You take time to read the Scriptures, to be with Christ and his word, in meditation, solitude and worship. You are committed to growth.

5. A disciple of Jesus is ministry-minded. A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to serving together with others in the cause of Christ. A disciple of Jesus is committed to becoming like Jesus in his servant hood. A disciple of Jesus recognizes that service offered to Christ and his cause here on earth will be recognized and rewarded in eternity. A disciple of Jesus recognizes that when Christ calls us to follow Him, he is calling us to join Him in the work he is doing in the world. 1 Peter 4:10 says: *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

6. A disciple of Jesus is committed to the church. A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to fellowship with others in the body of Christ. A disciple of Jesus recognizes that you can not be committed to Christ without, in a very real way, being also committed to his church. The church is his body through which he works and his bride, whom he loves, for whom he died. 1 Timothy 3:15 tell us that we need to learn how to conduct ourselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

7. A disciple of Jesus is devoted to disciple-making. A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ locally and globally. The only way to truly be a disciple of Jesus is to not only be committed to being a disciple of Jesus but to also be committed to making disciples of Jesus. That's the command of Christ which he gave in Matthew 28 at the end of his ministry. To be a true follower of Jesus Christ is to care about his cause and his concern for leading as many people as possible as deeply as possible into a life of discipleship.

There is not one of those seven qualities that are optional in a life of discipleship. They are all important.

The first two call us to an upward look. They direct you to God. The second two call us to an inward look. They direct you to yourself and your spiritual growth.

The last three call us to an outward look. They direct you to others and to ministry for the cause of Christ.

These seven facets of discipleship are like a plumb line that we can lay up against our discipleship to see where we need to grow. You don't have to do everything at once but you do have to keep the whole picture in view. It's one thing to say "I want to follow Christ," but it's another thing to look at all of the facets of discipleship, assess how you are doing and where you need to grow, and determine to do something about it.

As a starting place, notice that everything begins with the upward look.

THE WAY TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IS TO FOCUS ON GOD AND FIND FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST.

The biggest myth about making the most of your life is that the way you make the most of your life is by focusing on your life. What the Bible shows us is a completely different path. The Bible says...

If you want to make the most of your life get focused and stay focused on God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

In Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life*, the first sentence in the first chapter of the book says: "It's not about you." The amazing truth that we discover in both the pages of the Bible and the path of life is that when we shift our focus off of a shallow self-centeredness and on to the glory of God that change of focus proves to be both liberating and fulfilling. We find our deepest peace, our greatest pleasure, and our highest fulfillment when we look up and focus our lives on God and his glory.

How do you live all of life focused on the glory of God?

1. *First of all by enjoying him.* You glorify God by enjoying his goodness and his greatness. C.S. Lewis said: "In commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy him." You see you can not really glorify God in a way that honors him and empowers you unless you are enjoying and appreciating his goodness and greatness.

You glorify a scene of great natural beauty when you first drink in its awesome majesty and then express your heartfelt praise. If you try to express the glory without first feeling the majesty and being awed by the beauty, then the praise is empty and lifeless.

In the Psalms there is a phrase that can help us think of what it means to focus on God. It's this phrase: "*to you O LORD I lift up my soul*" (Psalms 25:1, 86:4,

143:8) That is an important figure of speech. The soul, the real inner you, can be either lifted up or dragged down.

Saint Augustine has a passage in which he asks: "How can I lift my soul? What ropes or machines are needed? What ladders?" Then he answers his own question. He says; "My will is the way I lift my soul. By neglecting God, my soul sinks, descends... by loving God, I mount the steps that lift my soul. Standing on the earth I am in heaven if I love God. The body to be lifted up must change its place, the heart to be lifted up must change its will."

Saint Augustine wrote 1,600 years ago but what he said is just as true today. If you think very little about God and think very lightly about God, your soul is going to be dragged down by the pressures and perspectives of this world. If you give into thoughts that are full of unbelief, fear, anger, lack of forgiveness to others, selfish thoughts, petty thoughts, greedy thoughts, and lustful thoughts, your soul will be dragged down.

But if you think great thoughts of God, you are lifting up your soul to him. When you pray, praise God and give thanks, you lift your heart to God. When you choose not to fear or fret but to believe, hope and love because of God's promises and his grace, you are lifting up your heart to God. Think great thoughts of God and think them often, appreciate and enjoy his greatness and goodness.

2. *We focus on God when we live for Him in all that we do.* Everything we do can be done for the glory of God by doing whatever we do for his pleasure, in his presence, prayerfully.

Your life is like a wheel. The rim constantly moves about in all the different areas and relationships of your life; work, home, children, friends, church. The hub is the center, the deeper you. At the hub of your life, you have a choice: You can be off center or you can be God centered. If you are off center, nothing will go smoothly or well. You are going to wear yourself out banging through life, hurting yourself and others.

If you want to make the most of your life find your fulfillment in Christ.

John 6:35: Then Jesus declared, "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*"

There are two ways to look at life in relationship to Jesus.

1. *First, is that you follow Jesus so that He might help you better feast on the stuff of life.* In other words, real life is something else and other than Jesus, but he will help you to find it and to get it. This way of thinking says that real life is all the stuff that everyone wants in this world; family, friends, fun, fame and finance. That's what you feast on in life. And you follow Jesus because he will help you

get all that stuff and then he will season it all so that it tastes even better. People who think like this don't leave their nets and boats to follow Jesus. They buy bigger nets and boats and expect Jesus to help pay for them.

What Jesus says in John 6 is that way of thinking is really the essence of false discipleship. In fact, if you study the whole chapter in which he says this, what you will see at the end is that many who had been coming along to enjoy the miracles of Jesus and listen to his teaching stopped following and left him once he explained that he is the bread of life. They were not true followers of Christ. They didn't mind Jesus helping them get the stuff of life but they didn't want to follow him as the source of life. But, that's what true discipleship is all about.

2. *The second way to look at life is that you follow Jesus because He himself is the feast.* He is the food and drink of life. All the other stuff, as good and important as some of it is, is all in addition to Christ Himself as the true food and drink of life. It's your relationship with Christ. It's his presence and His love that does for your soul and spirit what food does for your body. He nourishes and sustains you as you believe in Him. He satisfies your hunger and thirst for love and acceptance and for meaning and significance in life as you believe in Him and in his love and acceptance and constant presence.

If you let Jesus Christ be the bread of life for you, then your happiness does not depend on the "if onlys" of life. I would be happy "If only.... I was more beautiful, thinner, taller, smarter, richer, famous, married, single. "If only I could just" "If my wife treated me better, if my husband would pay more attention to me, if my wife (or husband) was a little bit more funny, thrifty, sexy, spiritual, dependable ... on and on it goes. Jobs, friends, relationships, achievements, athletic prowess, fun things, hobbies, on and on the list goes.

And yet.... and yet...

Jesus says all those who try to satisfy the hunger of their hearts apart from him will never be satisfied.

Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose again from the dead. He makes us right with God and sets us free spiritually when we turn to Him and trust in Him. Saving grace that brings forgiveness and eternal life is the gift of God through faith in Christ. But what God wants us to understand is that when we receive Christ as our Savior he comes into our lives, not only to be the source of our forgiveness but also to be the source of our fulfillment. Our calling is to choose to find our fulfillment in Him.

In order to make the most of life you have to do what Jesus says. You have to choose to follow Him. You learn to say with Peter: "*because you say so I will.*" and you learn to look up and get focused on God and be fulfilled in Christ.

2 “How To Make The Most Of The Rest Of Your Life”

Part 2: The Inward Look

Recently I read in some ALPHA material the testimony of a man named Ray. At 36 years old he thought he had everything he wanted in life. He had a beautiful wife, two healthy children, a successful job, high income, and lots of toys. He felt he had found the American dream. He was achieving the greatest financial success of his life. But then one day His wife came to him and said “I want a divorce.” He asked for ten days to talk about it. She agreed but the talking got them nowhere. It began to hit him. As he put it, “This plan I have in place, this foundation I've built my life on, there's something missing, there's something that's not there.” Toward the end of the ten days he was driving by a church. On an impulse he thought “I've tried everything else and nothing worked, so I'll look for help here”. It turned out the church was getting ready to run an ALPHA course and the pastor suggested he come. He didn't really see what that had to do with marriage but he agreed to attend. Sometime within their first four weeks they came to what was for them, a new kind of faith in Christ that changed them deeply.

He wrote: Within a month we had discovered not only a love for God but a love for each other. I felt my goals, aspirations, and focus start to change. Things that were everything to me before, like what kind of car I drove, how much money I had, or my status in life didn't seem to matter.... an entirely new world was opening up to me.... Now I read my Bible every day, I pray and my relationship with my sons has blossomed.

At the end of his story he sums up the change by saying that Jesus Christ is now the foundation for his life. (ALPHA News USA edition. No. 14, pages 16-17). I think it is fair to say that what this man discovered was that he wasn't able to hold his life together, much less make the most of his life, until he built his life on Christ.

What that man discovered is a truth that is radically different from anything we find in the world around us. And yet it is a truth that Jesus clearly and repeatedly declared throughout his life and ministry. In John 10:10, Jesus says: *“I have come to give you life and to give it to you in its fullness.”* Jesus calls us to come to Him as our Savior and follow him as our Lord in a life of discipleship so that we can find the fullness of life that he alone can give us.

Jesus Christ is refreshingly clear about this. He doesn't leave us with any uncertainty as to the importance of living our lives as his disciples. In Luke 9:23-25 He says: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever*

loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

If the way to make the most of life is this way of life that the Bible calls "discipleship," then we need to know what this means. Last week we began to look at this and we saw that the essence of discipleship is following Christ. It is doing what he says as you follow him as your Lord. We also started looking at what we are calling, seven facets of true discipleship.

The Seven Facets of Discipleship are these:

A disciple of Jesus Christ is....

1. Focused on God
2. Fulfilled in Christ
3. Biblically integrated
4. Growth oriented
5. Ministry-minded
6. Committed to the church
7. Devoted to disciple-making

- The first two call us to an upward look. They direct us to God and our relationship with him. We looked at these last week.
- The last three call us to an outward look they direct us to others and our service for them. We will look at them next week.
- The two in the middle, "Biblically integrated" and "Growth oriented" call us to an inward look. They direct us to ourselves and our personal spiritual growth. This is our focus today.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE YOU NEED TO GET BIBLICALLY INTEGRATED.

We can sum it up this way: A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to knowing God's Word and applying it to every aspect of life.

There are many places where you see this taught in the Scriptures.

John 8:31-32 says: *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

In Matthew 7:24 -28, Jesus says: *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the*

rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

While following Jesus is the essence of discipleship, these verses clearly tell us that one of the indispensable elements in following Christ is a certain relationship to the Bible. In both verses Jesus describes a relationship to the Bible that is both profound and powerful. Jesus is saying that if your relationship to the Bible is profound its effect in your life can be powerful. The Bible can be a power to set you free and a foundation on which you can build your life.

What we need to do is this.... We need to be committed to a profound relationship with the Word of God.

In the verses above you see two strong images of your relationship to the Bible.

First, in John 8:31-32 Jesus says we are to *"hold to"* his teachings.

What does that mean?

To *"hold to"* Christ's teaching is to listen, to learn and live it and to persevere in doing that. The Greek words translated *"hold to"* literally mean to *"continue"* or *"stay"* or *"remain"* in one place or state. It would be used of people who decided to settle down and live in one place. They stayed there. They held to that place.

So when Jesus says, *"I want you to hold to my teachings"*, He is calling for a commitment to continue in them. He is saying *"I want you to listen to my teaching, learn from my teaching, live in my teaching and remain in my teachings. Don't leave them, and don't let them go."*

A disciple of Jesus is a learner. That's the root meaning of the word *"disciple"*. But a disciple of Jesus is a learner who learns it in order to live it and lives it for the long haul.

The second image, which comes from Matthew 7:24-28, is that we are to *"build on"* the words of Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ says: think of your life as a building that you are constructing and build your life on the foundation of the Scriptures, the Word and truth of God.

Now think of that image. If you are building a home, how much of the home do you build on the foundation? Every bit of it. That's one of the lessons that we learn from this image that Christ gives us. If you want your house (your life) to be strong and successful, you have to build every bit of it on the right foundation.

That's why we say that a disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to knowing God's Word and applying it to every aspect of life. You don't build your house and put the living room on the foundation but then build the bedroom out on the sand.

One of the dangers we all face as Christians is that we build some of our lives on the foundation but not all of it. Some of us end up with whole wings and additions and important rooms in the building of our lives out on the sand and not on the rock of God's truth at all!

God wants us to build all of our lives on the foundation of His Word the Bible.

We need to be committed to a profound relationship with the Word of God that affects every area of our lives.

You see this throughout the Scriptures. I noticed this the other day in the book of Ephesians. After the first half (Ephesians 1-3) tells us all about what God has done for us in Christ, the book of Ephesians begins to address a wonderful kaleidoscope of issues that touch on almost every aspect of life.

Just to mention some of them ...

In Ephesians 4:

- It talks about our words, the way we speak to others and the impact of what we say.
- It talks about our emotions and the way they affect our relationships with people.

In Ephesians 5:

- It talks about sex
- It talks about time management
- It talks about alcohol
- It talks about the Holy Spirit and our relationship to Him
- It talks about marriage and the relationship between husbands and wives.

In Ephesians 6:

- It teaches us about parenting and the relationship between parent and child.
- It goes on to talk about our work life and how we view the work we do for others in light of our relationship with God.
- It goes on to talk about Satan and the serious struggles of spiritual warfare.

What you see is the Bible in a very direct and meaningful way addressing every area of life. Words, emotions, sex, time, alcohol, God's spirit, your marriage, parenting, and work; the disciple of Jesus is called to both learn and live by God's Word as it speaks to every area of life.

This is what it means to be "biblically integrated". To integrate is to bring various parts together into one whole. To be Biblically integrated is to bring all the parts of your life together with all of the truth of God's Word so that your life and His word are in harmony.

A little four-year-old girl had been to Sunday school or Vacation Bible School and learned the little song, the B-I-B-L-E. Do you know that song? Well, one night as she was getting ready for bed she wanted to sing it. And she did. She sang: "The B-I-B-L-E, yes, that's the book for me, I stand alone on the Word of God, and that's what it's all about. Yeah, she mixed up the B-I-B-L-E and the Hokey Pokey, but she nailed the way that each of us should view the Word of God.

All of life is about standing on the foundation we have in the Word of God. When Jesus says "*build your life on this foundation,*" He is saying, get every room, every aspect of your life, on the foundation that I give you in the Word of God.

It's an essential part of true discipleship. If you want to make the most of the rest of your life you need to get Biblically integrated.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE YOU NEED TO GET GROWTH ORIENTED.

Here's the key statement: A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to ongoing growth in spiritual maturity.

2 Peter 3:18 says: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

The Bible teaches us that the Christian life begins with a gift of life that leads to a process of growth. The new birth, this gift of new life, comes when the Holy Spirit works in your heart drawing you to faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. The Spirit of God works in and on and with your heart and mind and will to awaken in you a need for God, to draw you to faith in Christ. You come to see and believe Christ died and rose again to pay the penalty for your sins and to secure your eternal salvation. You admit that you need his forgiveness and his grace and you turn to Him as your Lord and Savior in repentance and faith. If you have done that, you have been born again. You have received the gift of new life and eternal life. Everyone has to come to Christ the same way. But when you come to Christ, when you have been born again, it's just the beginning of your new life. In this new life God wants you to grow spiritually and continually. 1 Peter 2:2 says: *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk,* (that's an image from

the Bible, the Scriptures, the Word of God) *so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,*

What does it mean to grow Spiritually?

To grow in grace means that the practical effect of the grace of God in your life increases in its degree of impact, depth, and strength. Repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage; all these things can be little or great, strong or weak, vigorous or feeble. All of these qualities can be present in our lives at different degrees or strengths during different stages of our lives. For you to grow spiritually means that your sense of sin is becoming deeper, your faith is becoming stronger, your hope brighter and more valuable to you, your love more extensive and mature, your spiritual-mindedness sharper and more clear. It means that you grow to feel more of the presence and power of God and godliness in your heart and you manifest more of it in your life.

Sometimes the Spirit of God works in your life to change those things that are most strategic for your ongoing discipleship. It's not surprising that these things will often be your points of greatest resistance. If you live by your impulses, He will call you to be more principled and disciplined. If you harbor bitterness, he will call you to let go of your grudges and offer forgiveness to others from the heart. If you are always a little irritated by and critical of others, he will call you to be more humble, accepting and loving. If you tend to live and work for your own glory and gain, he will call you to a radically new perspective in which he is for you the bread of life and you live your life to advance his kingdom by serving others. In your marriage and with your children, in your most intimate and precious relationships and in the deepest places of your heart he will call you to grow and change.

How important is it to grow spiritually?

If the Words of the Bible mean anything, then you ought to be growing spiritually and you need to be growing spiritually.

2 Thessalonians 1:3 says, *We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.*

Colossians 1:10 says, *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.*

2 Corinthians 10:15 says, *Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow.*

1 Thessalonians 3:12 says, *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.*

Philippians 1:9 says, *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.*

1 Thessalonians 4:1 says, *Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.*

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you are good enough as you are right now. You are loved and accepted in Christ just as you are but you are called to continually grow in grace. Don't stop growing.

A pastor I know of tells of how refreshingly different he found it when he went to a new church and a seventy-six-year-old-man said to him, "Pastor, I'm looking forward to growing in Christ under your ministry."

Ongoing growth is the inevitable necessity of true Christian discipleship.

John Owen was right when he said: "I must kill sin or sin will kill me." He was recognizing that you must keep growing and dealing with sin ruthlessly or it will grow like a cancer and drain you of all spiritual vitality.

How do you grow spiritually?

Realize that you need to grow and decide that you want to grow. Welcome the fact that there are things in your life that God wants to change. He wants you to change both for his glory and for your good because he loves you. There are things in all of our lives that God wants to change. Wherever there are things in your life that God wants to change, don't accept them and don't excuse them -- don't compromise or deny the truth. Bring those areas to Christ in honest confession.

Plant your spiritual roots deep in the awesome love of God revealed in your Savior Jesus Christ. Keep turning your heart away from both the deceptions of sin and the disappointments of life and find in God and in Christ the power of a love that never fails you.

Bring the power of prayer to bear directly on those areas where you need to grow and change. Pray honest, specific prayers in which you confess your needs and ask for help. Just as physical life needs nourishment to grow so also does spiritual life.

Growth requires nourishment so nourish your spiritual life with the word of God. Read the Scriptures, meditate on the meaning of God's word as it applies to your

life. Read the Scriptures as both a manual for life and a love letter from God. Let the Scriptures go deep and change forever not only what you think but also what you treasure.

Growth requires nourishment and growth also requires exercise so stay active in ministry and serving opportunities and in fellowship with other Christians. Commit to being lovingly loyal and faithful in Christian fellowship and service. Sometimes those commitments will test you but that testing is a good thing. It is part of the process of growth. Don't just find a comfortable place to rest. Get growth oriented.

Jesus who died for your redemption will empower your transformation as you love him and trust enough to follow him in a life of discipleship. How do you make the most of the rest of your life? Get focused on God, fulfilled in Christ, Biblically integrated and growth oriented.

3 "How To Make The Most Of The Rest Of Your Life"

Part 3: The Outward Look

This morning is the third message on "How To Make The Most Of The Rest Of Your Life" One thing I noticed this week is that this idea of "making the most" of things is a lot more popular than I realized. I noticed this week that there are books and seminars and internet web sites devoted to "making the most" of just about everything conceivable.

How to make the most of your hardware, software, time, children, vacation, retirement, dyslexia, windows, visit to the Spa, lunch (by including the right mix of proteins, vegetable and fruit), camera, the global market, and on and on the list went. There was even a web site from England called "Top Trout" which was billed as the first web site dedicated to helping fishermen make the most of the fish they have already caught. They have a complete range of filet knives and other tools, services and accessories to help you make the most of the fish you catch when fishing. Now, if people are this concerned about making the most of the stuff in their lives, doesn't it make sense that we would want to know how to make the most of life itself.

That's what we're looking at in these messages. What we have seen is that Jesus Christ is unavoidably clear about the fact that the only way to make the most of our lives is to live our lives as his disciples.

Mark 8:34-35 says: *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

The Bible tells us that the essence of discipleship is following Christ. And it helps us understand what that comes to look like by also showing us what we've called the facets of discipleship.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is....

1. Focused on God
2. Fulfilled in Christ
3. Biblically integrated
4. Growth oriented
5. Ministry-minded
6. Committed to the church
7. Devoted to disciple-making

- The first two call us to an upward look. They direct us to God and our relationship with him.
- The second two call us to an inward look. They direct us to ourselves and our personal spiritual growth.
- The last three call us to an outward look. They direct us to others and our ministry in the world. This is our focus today.

It's clear in the Bible that authentic Christian discipleship involves not only an upward look and an inward look but also an outward look.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE BE MINISTRY MINDED.

A disciple of Jesus who is not ministry-minded is a contradiction. Why? Because the essence of discipleship is following Christ and Jesus described himself as above all a servant.

To follow Christ you must first recognize and receive what he has done for you.

In Mark 10:45, Jesus said: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" What this means is that our salvation comes to us through the servanthood of what Jesus did for us.

Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and rose again from the dead because he was serving us for our salvation to the glory of God. We do not serve God in order to be saved. We receive forgiveness and eternal life as the gift of God through faith in Christ because he has served us in order to be our Savior.

We need to understand that but we also need to understand that when we turn to Christ and trust in him as our Savior we are called to follow Him as our Lord. Part of what that means is that just as he has served us so we are to serve others in his name.

To follow Christ you must be a servant to others.

Philippines 2:3-8 says: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

Verse 5 says your attitude is to be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Verse 7 says that Christ took the very nature of a servant.

A lot of people are willing to serve some but they are not willing to choose to be a servant. There's a big difference. When you choose to serve that's a good thing but it's not discipleship. Discipleship is choosing to be a servant. If you choose to serve you are still in charge of your life. You will give an hour here and a dollar there as you choose. But if you choose to be a servant you are saying something far more radical. You are saying, "I am choosing to follow Christ with my whole life. I'm choosing to see my life as a life of surrender to God in which I am available and vulnerable." My life's purpose is to work and serve for the cause of Christ and the good of people to the glory of God. That's not just something I do with part of my life, that's who I am as a disciple of Jesus Christ because as a disciple of Christ I follow Him. He chose to be a servant; so do I.

To follow Christ you must be willing to serve with others.

Philippines 2:3-11 is not just written to individuals but to a church: people living in community and working as a team. If you read it in its context, that's clear. It's also clear in the Greek. When the Scriptures use the words "you" and "your" throughout this passage, those words are plural so it's not you as an individual but you as a church together.

Only in verse 4 does the focus shift for a moment onto the individual responsibilities of each person in the group. As he says: *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* This is the theme in the whole New Testament.

To follow Christ is not only to be willing to serve others but to be willing to serve with others as part of a community, a team of people committed to a common cause.

In the book *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg tells the story of *The Three Christs Of Ypsilanti*. That's the name of another book written by a psychologist who worked with three men who were patients at a psychiatric hospital in Ypsilanti Michigan. These three men; Leon, Joseph, and Clyde, all claimed to be Jesus Christ. In an attempt to get them to see reality the psychiatrist decided to put them all together. They would sleep in adjacent beds, eat together, work together and meet in small groups together. The hope was that three people all claiming to be Jesus would rub some reality into each other. It made for some interesting conversations. One of the men would say: "I'm the Messiah I was sent here to save the earth." The doctor would ask: "How do you know? He would say: "God told me." Then one of the other men would interrupt and say something like, "I never told you any such thing." (Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, pp.107-108)

Two things are interesting about that. First, why is it that people who claim to be Christ usually seem to be big on his power and prestige but weak on his life of humility and service for others? We cannot be Christ , but we can be like Christ. If we are like Christ it will be seen not in our claims to a superior importance but in our willingness to serve others and to serve together with others for the good of others and the glory of God.

Second, part of the irony of their insanity is that their need to cling to the illusion of being more than who they really were is what kept them from being all that they could have been. If Leon, Joseph and Clyde could have stopped competing to be the Christ, they could have become Leon, Joseph and Clyde.

It's the same way with us. If we give up the messiah complex that wants to be First, we can become ourselves in God's plan and kingdom and be of some real good as we grow to become more like the real Christ. If we choose to give up our independence and become servants of God who serve others and serve with others in his name, we will actually become more and more like Christ and find ourselves and life on the way.

Ortberg writes: "God's great, holy joke about the messiah complex is this: Every human being who has ever lived has suffered from --except one. He was the messiah." (p. 126)

If you want to make the most of the rest of your life you need to be ministry minded. The next facet of discipleship is closely related to this.

**IF YOU WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE
BE COMMITTED TO THE CHURCH.**

Why?

Because in Matthew 16:18 Jesus said: ... *I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

What follows in the Scriptures is the story of the growth of the church in the book of Acts and then the letters to the churches in the New Testament Epistles. Even the letters to individuals like Timothy and Titus are all about how to follow Christ and serve him in the context of His church. In fact, when the apostle Paul writes to Timothy, he says, the purpose of this letter inspired by the Holy Spirit, is this: 1 Timothy 3:15 ... *that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.* What the Scripture is doing here is not just piling up meaningless flowery words. It is very deliberately describing the church in a way that underscores its importance. It is God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Someone might say, well, those words fit the ideal, the spiritual, invisible church, but is that really true of our church?

Yes, it is. The letter to Timothy is written about his ministry in the church in the city of Ephesus. It was a local church with elders and deacon and deaconesses and strengths and weaknesses. As the apostle Paul writes to Timothy to impress on him and on us the importance of our commitment to and conduct in a real church. A local church.

We cannot claim to be following Christ if we are not committed to the church He is building. It is the structure he has established through his Word for our life together as we follow him.

The Scriptures tell that there is spiritual connection that we have with each other in the church by the grace of God and there are practical consequences that come out of that connectedness as an expression of our discipleship.

You see the connection Christ gives us in Romans 12:5. It says...*in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

Romans 12:10-16 gives us the practical consequences that need to follow:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not

curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

To belong to a church and to be committed to the work and worship and people of God in that church is an essential expression of true discipleship.

Commitment to the church as a disciple of Jesus is biblical essential but it is becoming increasingly rare.

A prominent professor from Great Britain recently described modern culture as the first culture with attention deficit disorder, He said: "From a physical standpoint, a community is a collection of individuals, but residents of a true community act like members of something that is larger than themselves." (Frazee, *The Connecting Church* p. 57) Remember how Romans 12:5 said in the church ... *in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

One recent author sums up the problem when he says that too often today's church is "not a community but rather a collection of individuals." (Frazee, *The Connecting Church* p.45)

What many churches, including ours, does to help address the need for community is to create small groups. The idea is we can't get to know everyone well on Sunday mornings but through smaller groups, ministry teams, bible studies or growth groups we can begin to create a community of disciples. But the problem is if the commitment isn't there even the things that could be cures will fail to create a community.

A couple of quotes have recently impressed this on me. Professor Robert Wuthnow from Princeton has written a book called *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community*. He has found that small groups mainly "Provide occasions for individuals to focus on themselves in the presence of others. The social contract binding members together asserts only the weakest of obligations. Come if you have time. Talk if you feel like it. Respect everyone's opinions. Never criticize. Leave quietly if you become dissatisfied." (Quoted by Frazee, *The Connecting Church* p. 47)

In *Overcoming Loneliness in Everyday Life*, two Boston psychiatrists, Jacqueline Olds and Richard Swartz, suggest that because of their episodic nature, groups "fail to replicate the sense of belonging we have lost. Attending weekly meetings, dropping in and out as one pleases, shopping around for a more satisfactory or appealing group -- all of these factors work against the growth of true community." (Quoted by Frazee, *The Connecting Church* p. 47)

Don't misunderstand what these authors are saying and what I am saying is not that small groups aren't important. In fact, the author from Princeton sees that as a huge help to developing Christian community. The point is that even small groups that are designed to develop community cannot create community where there is no commitment to developing community on the part of the participants. Where the commitment is lacking you will never find the community that Christ envisioned.

Now, what all of the research shows us is simply the practical importance of the life to which Scripture already calls us. Christ calls us as his disciples to be committed to His church.

If you want to make the most of the rest of your life be ministry minded and committed to the church.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE BE DEVOTED TO DISCIPLE MAKING.

The idea of being devoted to disciple making comes from a very important statement Jesus made at the end of his earthly ministry. This statement is commonly called The Great Commission. Matthew tell us that after the resurrection, when Jesus was preparing to leave his disciples he gave them a commission. He gave them a mission. Matthew 28:18-20 says ... *Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

We need to understand the mission to which Christ calls us.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ

The mission we're given is not just to get people to say a prayer or come to church. The mission is to draw people into a whole new way of life in which they are trusting in Christ as their Savior and following Him as Lord and living their lives as disciples of Jesus who glorify God by following Christ daily. That's why in the commission Jesus includes baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is committed to multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ locally and globally.

A disciple of Jesus is a person who has developed a heart for reaching people in his or her own locality and community. It's been suggested that it would be better to call this commission, "The everyday commission." For some, the word "great" suggests an overwhelming task for super Christians only -- A task and purpose that is easy to associate with a ministry to far-away-hard-to-reach-places but difficult to associate with everyday people in close-to-home-places like Daytona Beach. The truth is The Great Commission is every Christian's everyday calling. It's very important that we know and understand that.

Recent studies have determined that the United States now has an estimated 200 million unreached people. That makes our country an urgent emerging mission field, the fifth largest mission field in the world!

We need to care about the cause of Christ in our own community and country but we also need to look beyond our community. Christ wants us to look beyond our own community and see the world as he sees it. It is estimated that there are 17,000 identifiable tribes, cultures, or what are called "people groups" in the world that do not have even a single Christian church in their culture and language to present the gospel to them. There are 2.7 billion unreached persons who have still not had their first opportunity to hear about Christ. When we think about these gigantic numbers, we are talking about real people.

A true disciple of Jesus Christ is not overwhelmed by that need nor is he or she indifferent to it. As disciples of Jesus we refuse to be overwhelmed because we believe that God is sovereign. We refuse to be indifferent because we are committed to the cause of Christ.

What is our response? A disciple of Jesus says: "Lord, I'll go to distant places if that is what you want me to do." "I'm willing to use my retirement to serve your cause." "I'm willing to support my children serving you on a distant mission field if that's the ministry to which you call them." "I'm also willing to stay here to pray for and support others while I work in this community for your cause."

If you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ you need to know that he wants you to take part in his mission in the world. He wants you to glorify Him by helping others to find their gladness in His goodness and greatness. Be willing to be a team player with the people of your church, participating in its worship and work for the cause of Christ in our community and all around the world.

Discipleship is a life-long journey. You have to take it one step at a time. You have to rely on His grace and strength all the way. You can't do everything perfectly and at once but it is important to keep all the facets of the goal clearly in view.

Christ calls you. He says, "*Come follow me.*"

You need to say: "Lord, you are my Savior, I trust in you and I will follow you as you help me by your grace. Lord I want to be focused on you, fulfilled in Christ, biblically integrated, growth oriented, ministry minded, committed to your church and devoted to disciple-making. Help me as I follow you."

It's easy to waste your life. You don't even have to think about it. To make the most of your life requires a conscious decision to be disciple of Jesus. Make that decision and follow him.