

Follow: Discipleship 101

Mark 9:30-37

When you enter a four year college your first year is made up of taking some basic classes that give you a broad foundation in areas like English, Math, Science and history. These classes set the stage for you to then go on and get to your specific major classes in Engineering, Education, nursing or whatever course of study you are pursuing. Let's say you are taking an entry level English class covering the basics of writing and grammar. That class might be listed in the catalogue as English 101. The number 101 tells you this is a foundational English class. When you pass English 101 you might go on to English 102 and eventually if you major in English you might get to English 201 or 304. Those are the more specific, higher level classes.

But even when you get into those higher-level classes, you must have the basics of English 101 down. It's like learning the difference between the brake pedal and the gas pedal. It doesn't matter what else you know about car, if you don't know that difference, your experience of driving will not be smooth.

Today we are going to talk about some of the basics of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and I've called this Discipleship 101. We won't be able to make progress as disciples unless we know and practice these things. Now, for those who have been followers of Christ for 20 and 30 years, it's important to be reminded of these elementary truths.

But in the Gospel of Mark we have the disciples of Jesus being introduced to these truths for the first time and they are struggling to grasp them. It's like they have had their first test of the semester in Discipleship 101 and they failed. So Jesus goes back over the same material to make sure they get it. So, open to Mark 9:30-37 and we are going to learn with the disciples **3 Practices Required to grow as disciples of Jesus.**

1. Master the Foundation of Discipleship (vv. 30-32)

Look with me at verse 30. So, keep in mind that beginning with Christ's teaching in 8:31 regarding his death and resurrection, the disciples are on a journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem. 8:31 happened in Caesarea Philippi, north of Israel, and now they are journeying south. This whole trip or journey is spent teaching about

what it means to follow Jesus and the fact that it takes place of a journey is meant to teach us that our lives as disciples are a journey as well.

As they journey south they come to the region where most of the ministry of Jesus has happened so far, Galilee. This time, however, Jesus does not intend to do public ministry. Instead, it tells us at the end of verse 30 that he was thinking exactly the opposite. He wanted to keep things quiet. Why? Look at the beginning of verse 31. Now Jesus is specifically focused on teaching his disciples and we get to listen in and watch and learn. So, what is he teaching them? Look at the rest of verse 31.

We've obviously seen this before. It's the second time He has labored to explain this to them. What exactly is he teaching? Notice that the phrasing this time is a bit different from 8:31. In chapter 8 he told them he would suffer and be rejected but this time we learn that Jesus, as the Son of Man, will be delivered into the hands of men.

Jesus became the son of man in order to serve men and sinful men will reject his act of love and compassion by killing him. Listen to John 1:9-13.

So, in Mark 9:31 who does the rejecting? He was certainly delivered by Judas in one sense, but ultimately someone much greater than Judas delivered Jesus into the hands of sinful men. He was delivered into the hands of sinful and inhumane man by God the Father in order to fulfill His will. He was delivered to suffer because of God's great love for us. God does not love us because Jesus died. Jesus suffered and died because God loves us. Acts 2:22-24.

These are deep things. God sent Jesus to become man, to die by the hands of the very one's he came to save in order to rescue them from sin and all of this is according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. These are the truths that ought to melt our hearts of stone.

And these are truths that are the very foundation of our discipleship. Listen to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. Why is our discipleship founded on the gospel? These are the truths that tell us how we came to be followers of Christ in the first place. These truths situate us within the story of God's grace. We cannot be proud or boastful once we understand the work that God has done through Christ to save us. We must never move away from this grace and we can't if we

are truly followers of Jesus. Every day, every opportunity to grow is a gift of grace to us. We begin by grace and continue by God's grace and the gospel is the way to situate our lives within that grace.

For some of you who have been saved for many years, you need to go back to the basics. You need to reacquaint yourself with truths like justification, adoption, redemption, union with Christ, and predestination. Maybe there used to be a sizzle in your heart when you thought of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. Now, it's just a stale doctrine that you think you've grown out of. For followers of Christ nothing is more sweet than these words found in Romans 5:8.

So, we must master the truths of the gospel if we are to grow as disciples. We never move away from these realities and so we must deepen our knowledge of these things and put these truths in front of our minds all the time.

Unfortunately, the disciples of Jesus aren't quite there yet. Look at verse 32. In chapter 8 Peter spoke for all the disciples, now Mark makes it clear that none of them are getting it. Why? Something is keeping them from grasping the beauty of these truths and that's our next practice found in verses 33-34.

2. Mortify the Hindrance to Discipleship (vv. 33-34)

So, Jesus has been explaining the foundational truths of his death and resurrection to the disciples while they journeyed from north of Israel into Galilee. In verse 33 they arrive at Capernaum and enter a house, which we assume is Peter's house.

Jesus has been teaching on his sacrificial death along the way, but he wants to know what the disciples have been discussing along the way. Look at the rest of verse 33. The disciples answer and it would be comical if it wasn't so sad. Look at verse 34.

It's quite the juxtaposition here. Jesus has been talking about personal sacrifice for the good of others and the disciples have been arguing over which of them was the greatest. The way this is worded tells us that they were actually systematically reasoning through why each should be considered the greatest. They were literally debating and laying out logical arguments for their own greatness.

Of course, when Jesus brings it up they are silent, like a group of 5-year-old boys caught in the act.

Now, it's easy to mock the disciples here for their self-centeredness, but we are equally as culpable. This is the major hindrance to our discipleship. In fact, this is the root issue when it comes to sin.

God created human beings in His image in the Garden of Eden. Among other things, that means we are designed to look outward to love God and love others. God is a Trinity and so He defines this outward looking love. His love for the Son led Him to create the world and people who would also come to love His Son.

When Adam and Eve sinned they turned in on self and began to trust their own judgment over God's Words. Rather than God being the center of the solar system, they tried to start living with self at the center.

The disciples here in Mark 9 are having trouble grasping the sacrificial love of Jesus because they are so focused on self and the position they will each receive in the kingdom. They must mortify, or put to death, this self-centeredness and learn to love God and others.

This is the issue for us in our lives, isn't it? We live in the age of the selfie. Even if you have never taken a selfie, that doesn't mean you are free from the sickness of self-centeredness. Tim Keller has an incredibly short and helpful book called *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*. Here's a quote that gets you the main idea of the book.

"Gospel-humility is not needing to think about myself. Not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to thoughts such as, 'I'm in this room with these people, does that make me look good? Do I want to be here?' True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings."

If being a follower of Christ is about sacrificial love for others, self-love is like a massive road block to that destination. We need to put self-centeredness to death by learning to forget self. The only way to do that is to follow the 3rd practice.

3. Model the Ethic of Discipleship (vv. 35-37)

The best way to forget about self is to actively, intentionally serve others. So, Jesus explains this. Look at verse 35. I love the image of Jesus gathering them in and sitting them down for a good talk.

The ethic of the kingdom is the exact opposite of the world. The place of honor or prestige would have been very important to the disciples in this culture but they are going about it the wrong way. In Christ's value system those who serve are the greatest, not those who pursue status by stepping on others.

This word "servant" means an assistant. Think in terms of one who cleans a house or who works as an administrative assistant. If there's a VP or CEO in your company and they have an administrative assistant, that assistant's mission is to make sure the boss has what he or she needs and to ensure that his job gets done. His job is the boss's job.

In other words, those who are truly great in Christ's kingdom live to make others look great. They live to serve others.

"At no point does the way of Jesus diverge more sharply from the way of the world than on the question of greatness. Jesus does not exactly repudiate prominence and greatness, but he redefines them. The challenge is to be great in things that matter to God. Nothing is greater in God's eyes than giving, and no vocation affords the opportunity to give more than that of a servant." – James Edwards

Jesus gives them an illustration. Look at verses 36-37. Now, notice very carefully what Jesus does here. He is not telling them to be like a child to enter the kingdom here. That comes in Mark 10:15. Why the child here? Well, notice what Jesus says in verse 37. Look how many times the word "receive" is used in verse 37. To be great by relating to God, we must receive those who are weak. Jesus uses a child to make his point here because children were among the most marginalized people in the Roman Empire.

50% of children didn't even make it to adulthood. Children were forced to work, they were exploited in a variety of ways and they were often physically beaten along the way. In the social ladder of the day children were at the bottom rung. They were the least important.

But if you claim to be a follower of Christ, you demonstrate that you are a servant of all and like Christ by receiving and serving the least important people in society. Rather than focusing in our own agenda we are to actively and intentionally help those on the fringes of our culture. Who else fits into this category? Orphans, widows, kids in the foster care system, immigrants, racial minorities, the unborn, people with physical or mental disabilities.

Now, I want you to see how passionate God is about this throughout the Scriptures. Did you know that one of the major sins that Israel committed in the OT was that they mistreated the poor and socially marginalized? Listen to a couple of passages. Isaiah 1:17-18. Jeremiah 5:25-29.

God's heart for Israel was that they would be a place that takes care of the weakest and most vulnerable in society. Sometimes you will hear Christians say, "well, that was under the Old Covenant and that was with Israel." The problem is that you see the same compassion and heart for the weak and vulnerable with Jesus in the NT.

We have these words from Jesus here and we also have this statement in the book of James 1:27-28. Because of this basic economy, the progression of verse 37 is earth shattering. A deed done out of kindness toward the least and lowest member of society is done to God Himself. If Jesus were to show up, we would each fall all over ourselves to serve him. We would be honored to give up our chair for him, to bring him a cup of coffee, or to be attentive to His needs.

The fact is that according to Jesus, you can bring him a cup of coffee and give up your chair for him anytime you want. You can do that by finding someone who has a need and by meeting that need.

This is the ethic of discipleship because this is exactly what Jesus did for us. When we get self-centered and forget about those around us in need, we must remember what Jesus has done for us and that takes us back to the foundation of our discipleship. Keep in mind where you were. Eph. 2:1-3.

We serve because we have been so graciously served. Grace motivates grace.

So, master the foundation of discipleship, mortify the hindrance, and model the ethic and attempts at modeling the ethic will always circle you back around to

reacquaint you with the foundation, the finished, grace saturated work of Christ.
So let's end there with the rest of that passage from Ephesians 2:4-7.