



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: January 11th - 17th

Sermon: January 10th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

January 11

1 Timothy 4:15, 1 Corinthians 1:30

The sermon for Sunday (Jan. 10) was entitled “The Urgency of Your Discipleship.” We first looked at the practical reasons for discipleship as they relate to preparedness. It is normal and wise to ready yourself for challenges that are headed our way. Secondly, we focused on the foundational reasons for discipleship. This included the biblical mandate that every follower of Christ be a disciple – an imitator of Christ both in word and deed. Finally, we looked at some of the benefits or profit of discipleship in the believer’s life. It is often not easy to obey the Lord and comes with self-denial, cross bearing, and fighting both without and within. So why exercise spiritual discipline? Because the benefits are far greater than any sacrifice a child of God will ever make. Now, let’s take a look over the next seven days at some other points to ponder.

The truth of the matter dear brothers and sisters is that you cannot be a truly saved person if you are not a disciple of Christ. The word itself means a learner and a follower. The goal of discipleship is the production of Christlikeness. In other words, “a disciple is being intentionally equipped with the Word of God through accountable relationships that are empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to produce Christ-like-ness.” At the very heart of discipleship is learning and growing. Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:15 these words, “Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.” The “these things” in that passage are the spiritual disciplines that will be present in a follower of Jesus. Spiritual disciplines include reading the Bible, attending church where you expose yourself to good Bible teaching, and exercising your spiritual gifts in ministry and service.

Dear church family, I want you to please understand today that you must not consider yourself a Christian if you are not actively and intentionally following (pursuing) Christ. Surely you would agree with me that it makes no sense to say that you are a Christian and then willfully choose not to follow in the ways and steps of Jesus. Jesus said, “Take up our cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). In order to be saved, a person must first be regenerated by Christ (given a new heart), declared justified by God, AND sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit. If any of these three elements are missing, then a person is not saved! What I’m pressing today folks is the absolute need for you to get serious about growing in the Lord. Discipleship is not an add on for the religious elite. It is a must for all those who are born again.

The Bible teaches (1 Cor. 1:30) us that our Lord undertook everything that we required for salvation. He delivered us from the guilt of our sins by His atoning death. Equally true and often ignored, is the fact that He also broke the dominion (power) of sin over our lives (Romans 6:14). He did all of this not only to justify us but also to sanctify us. Discipleship is our part in the sanctification process. We must place ourselves in positions for the Holy Spirit to blow across our lives and change us into the likeness of Christ. Look today at John 17:19; Eph. 5:25-26; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24; and Col 1:22. Here you will read that Christ undertakes the sanctification, not only the justification, of His people. Discipleship is a must for a follower of Christ.

January 12

Philippians 1:6; John 17:17

Yesterday, what we actually talked about was sanctification – the process by which we are changed into the image of Christ day by day. To repeat, sanctification is a necessary and inseparable outcome of being born again. When you are born again, you receive a new heart, a new nature, and a new way to live. Jesus said in John 15:5 that a person in union with Him (abides in Him) will produce much fruit. A branch which bears no fruit or evidence is no living branch of the Vine and is worthless before God. Remember dear friends, the devil has faith, but it has no effect on him because it is a dead faith. As James wrote, “True faith works and constrains a man to live unto the Lord” (James 2:17-20). Sanctification is the only real evidence that the Holy Spirit is indwelling a person which is essential to salvation (Rom. 8:9) and He will bear fruit in the believer’s life (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit becomes evident by the effects He produces in a person’s life just like you can tell the wind is blowing by the effects it produces. Again, I am reminded of what Jesus said in Luke 6:44, “Every tree is known by its fruit.”

Brothers and sisters, if we are indeed saved, we have a light and knowledge granted us from heaven above. We are brought to life, given spiritual sight, understanding, and sensitivity to the things of God. Whose fault is it I ask you if you are not pursuing holiness and showing evidence of sanctification? We are accountable and responsible beings. Jesus Christ prayed for us in John 17:17 that we would be sanctified. This alone provides reason we can know sanctification is possible. Let me tie this to discipleship.

The process of sanctification depends largely on the use of God’s provided means of grace. By this I am speaking of Bible reading, prayer both privately and corporately, regular attendance in worship services where you hear the reading and preaching of God’s Word, and involvement in small group Bible studies. I think it is safe to say that no one who is negligent or careless about these means of grace will ever make much progress in sanctification. So, remember that it is through the processes of discipleship that we utilize these means by which we are sanctified. Church, it is through these avenues that the Holy Spirit supplies fresh and ongoing grace to our souls and strengthens us as His disciples. Can you imagine a farmer who planted a crop and then just left it unattended and cared for? No one in his/her right mind would ever expect much good to come from that feeble effort at producing anything. Why then do we consider it unnecessary to tend to our very souls?

As I wrap this up for today, please understand that I am fully aware that it is not always easy to discipline ourselves in these areas of life. However, just because it is not easy does not mean we get a free pass. If anyone ever told you that growth in Christlikeness comes easy, they lied. Tomorrow I plan to write about the admonition of Paul to Timothy when he said, “Fight for your faith.” We will take that up tomorrow. God bless you dear church family and hang tough!

January 13

1 Timothy 1:18, 6:11-14

The fight that I write about today is a fight that every believer must be engaged in if we are to be saved. In no way am I saying that we must work for our salvation. I am however saying that as a result of being saved, we will face tremendous struggle with our enemies over faithfulness and obedience to Christ. There will be rounds of spiritual warfare that were it not for the armor the Lord has provided by which we do battle, we would surely be sunk. Alas, we must not despair on the battlefield for He has indeed made available all that we need to stand firm against the evil of this world, in this world, and even within ourselves. Let us look today at the fight that we must fight as disciples of our Lord Jesus. If we are to be holy, then we must fight.

Author J. C. Ryle said in his book Holiness, "True Christianity is a fight." Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:3-4, "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life." Can you imagine a soldier on the battlefield sleeping lazily while the war rages all around him? Therefore, we are admonished often in the Scriptures to stay alert, to be watchful, sober minded and awake (Mark 13:33; 1 Peter 5:8-9). Of course, we must be cognizant of who we are to be fighting. Certainly, it is not one another as children of God. So, then who are the enemies that we face in our call to discipleship and sanctification?

The principal battle of the Christian is with the world, our own flesh, and the devil. These are the three enemies that we must wage war against. These are the three enemies that will attempt to oppose us in our pursuit of holiness through discipleship. These are the areas we must gain victory. First of all, even after conversion, we carry within us a nature that is prone to sin. I like the way one writer put it, "We are imprisoned in the bodies of flesh while we live on this earth even as God's children." This is why Jesus told Peter that he was to watch and pray because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38). It is also why Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 9:26-27, "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." The old nature is defeated and yet still quite a foe.

Secondly, the world itself is our enemy in its fallen state. The temptations and lures of this world system are numerous and mighty when coupled with our old nature. I am reminded of Hebrews 12 where it is written, "That we must not entangle ourselves with the things of this world which so easily beset us." We all know it so easy to be caught up in this world and spend so much of our time chasing temporary and lesser things at the expense of pursuing Christ.

Finally, we fight the old enemy of God and mankind himself. 1 Peter 5:8 depicts him as seeking whom he can devour. If you are not disciplined and using the means of grace given to us by God, you will not be victorious in this real and present war. He is always carrying on a campaign against our souls and you cannot make it without a daily and intimate walk with the Lord empowered by the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is necessary and it is urgent! We must overcome and we do so by the word of God being firmly planted in our hearts.

January 14

Luke 14:28

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Pastor imprisoned and killed at the hands of Hitler said in a book he wrote called The Cost of Discipleship, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ." He went on to say, "Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has...what cost God much cannot be cheap for us." I think we can all relate to the question often asked when making a purchase – "How much does it cost?" Discipleship, and ultimately following Christ, is one such time when that question should be asked: how much will it cost me to follow Jesus Christ? Remember that yesterday we looked at the reality of the fight. I would like to add to that today the old cliché that says, no pain no gain.

Beloved, my simple point to ponder for today's devotion is that we must not fall into the lie that says it is easy or at least should be easy to follow Jesus. The truth is that it is difficult sometimes and will absolutely cost you a price to be a disciple of Christ. My hope is that you will not think it odd when it is a struggle to exercise spiritual disciplines that lead to sanctification. I hope you will realize it is normal to have to struggle to say no to certain worldly things so that you can say yes to a godly pursuit of holiness. Don't get confused here thinking that I am saying it costs you to have salvation. The truth is that you and I were bought with a price that Jesus paid himself (1 Cor. 6:20). Our cost is not for salvation, our cost is for sanctification. Now understand that you cannot actually separate the two. It is therefore a price that must be paid. Another way I could ask the question is this: What are we willing to give up to serve and follow Jesus as Lord? Recall for a moment the call on the rich young ruler's life to come and follow Jesus. Jesus stated the cost and the young man proved to be unwilling to pay. There is a cost to be paid and we must consider it.

We should know by now that to be a disciple of Christ there are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, an Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a garden of Gethsemane in which to surrender, a cross to be carried, and a race to be run. Our conversion puts us in a mighty conflict in which it costs much to win the victory. Some of the costs include our own self-righteousness. We must lay down our pride and thoughts of our own goodness. We must also lay down our sins. I'm here talking about the ones we really enjoy. We must repent and agree with God on what is and isn't sin. We must know that discipleship will cost us our love of *ease*. This means reading when you want to watch tv. It means going to bed early enough so that you can wake up early to study the Word and pray. It means serving the Lord and others when you want to spend time solely on self or family. It will also cost you favor of the world. To truly be a friend to God will cause you to be an enemy to this world. There are fights to be fought and a price to be paid. This call to discipleship is not easy!!

I am out of room for today so for now it will have to be enough for me to say the benefits of discipleship will far outweigh the costs when it is all said and done.

January 15

2 Peter 3:18

The question to be considered today is should we expect ourselves and others to genuinely grow in grace, holiness, and Christlikeness? The obvious answer from God's Word as well as practically speaking is a resounding YES! If you are a person, which you likely aren't if you are taking the time to read this, who treats their religion like your Sunday clothes that you put on once a week and then take off until the next week then you probably don't think or even care much about spiritual growth. But, if you do care and your relationship with Jesus is more than one hour on a Sunday morning, then you are sure to be thinking of the fleeting nature of time and how you want to truly grow as a follower of Jesus. You probably do want to know that you have built your life on the Rock of Ages and not shifting, sinking sand.

The first point to ponder today is the reality that there is such a thing as spiritual growth. Please keep in mind that I am not writing about growing in justification. You are as saved as you ever will be. You are as secure in Christ as you ever will be. You are as forgiven as you ever will be. I am writing about sanctification – becoming more like Jesus. Your level of faith, repentance, courage, zeal, and hope can absolutely increase as you surrender more fully to the Lordship of Christ and pursue Him more faithfully. You can become more broken over sin and you can manifest more of Christ in your life. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:10 a prayer that the believers would increase in the knowledge of God and in 1 Thess. 4:10 that they would increase more and more.... I hope that we could practically see and understand that there is a huge difference between a sapling when it is planted and a full-grown oak tree. The same should be and will be true in the life of a follower of Christ. We start out weak and a bit shaky and then we grow to maturity. This is expected and possible in a true believer's life.

Can you know if you are growing? Certainly. Now the truth is that we are often poor judges of our own condition. So, one way we know we are growing is by the assessment of someone else who recognizes and even comments on the realities that we have changed so much. But there are other ways to tell other than the testimony of others. You can tell that you are growing in Christ and in grace when you see more humility in your own life. Toward the end of Paul's life, he wrote that he was the worst among all sinners. What this means is that he had grown to compare himself against Christ and the perfect standards of God not against his fellow man. We can know that we are growing when we realize there is more love and faith within us, when there is more holiness and purity in our conversations. We can know that we are growing when we desire the things of God more than before. When you take more interests in spiritual things (biblical things) you are on the right track. Finally, when you are more generous and giving you are being shaped by the one who gave us His own Son.

So beloved, please know that genuine discipleship will profit you greatly. Our goal is not to turn you into "Dead Sea Christians." In other words, the Bible studies we do, the lessons we teach, the sermons we preach are intended to produce change in you. Your goal is not to simply soak in more and more information. The goal is that as you are soaking it in you are being changed and that is evidenced in increasing measures of growth in Christlikeness.

January 16

Matthew 7:24-27

Robby Gallaty wrote a book entitled Rediscovering Discipleship. There is a chapter in the book he called “Making Disciples in a McChristian Culture.” The first sentence in that chapter is, “We live in an “I want it now society.” Boy, who doesn’t love Amazon Prime? We can order an item and usually it is sitting on our doorstep within a day or two. We, as a society, have become so accustomed to instant gratification and we love slogans like “Hot-N-Ready.” 3G and 4G is not fast enough and 5G will not be for long. The problem is that “I want it now” mentality has crept into the church as well. How does this impact our methods of discipleship and our handling of the slow process of sanctification?

Churches all over our landscape are driven by numbers. I’ve often heard that our measuring stick for success in church is counting nickels and noses, so our goal is not spiritual growth but numeric. The problem however is that it is relatively easy to draw a crowd but much harder to make true disciples. One truth that we must recognize and accept is that you cannot mass produce Christians through some quick and immediate process. Gallaty said, “You can’t microwave disciples. Discipleship is a crock-pot recipe.” The reality is that discipleship takes a lot of time. Think about the problem that we face. Few people can stick with anything very long because we demand instant returns. Whether you set out to disciple someone or are being disciplined yourself, you must stay in it for the long haul. God does not hurry in His development of His children and He is never in a rush. Oh that we were not.

Think for a moment about the lives of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the apostles. God took a long time to shape and mold them for the work that He was calling them to. He did not hurry the process because there are so many lessons that must be learned over time. Again, I use my analogy from yesterday’s devotion – It takes a long time to grow a sapling into a huge, sturdy oak. I remember when Johanna and I had our house built. You know, it would have saved us a lot of time and money up front if we just avoided building the foundation. The foundation required that a man show up with a backhoe to dig the footing. That required careful reading of elevations by a surveyor and expertise from the backhoe operator to make sure that the footing was dug at just the right depths including the cool technique of stair stepping the footing at certain times. Then there was the placing and tying of the rebar onto the “chairs” at the bottom of the footing so that the concrete would hold together. Then all of that concrete, the spreading, the leveling, and more readings to be sure the elevations were perfect. It would have been so much easier to just push a little dirt to level it and start stacking cinderblocks. Who cares about all of that work that was simply covered up underground never to be seen again?

The answer is of course obvious. The foundation is a vital part of the whole house and without it the house will not stand for long. Storms will come, winds will blow, and the ground will settle and sink as the pressures of time reveal the weaknesses and shortcuts that lead to its collapse. The same is true for discipleship. It takes time but without it a person will not be able to stand under the pressures, temptations, and challenges of this life. It is worth the time and cost.

January 17

Mark 13:13

As we wrap up our points to ponder based on the sermon “The Urgency of Your Discipleship”, I wanted to basically recap what we’ve talked about. We believe that it is urgent for each of us to get serious about growing in the Lord so that when the real challenges to our faith arise, we will be able to stand in the day of adversity. Please know that this is not a call to oppose a political party. This is a call to ready yourself for the trials and tribulations that are on the horizon for Christians. As the bride of Christ becomes more despised, marginalized, and ultimately considered herself to be immoral, we must be able to hold onto faith and confidence in Jesus as we endure to the end. We must endure and we can because of the One who keeps us. It is imperative that you know Him, His Word, and His ways. You must be able to discern between what is good and evil, what is of the Lord and what is deception. As a disciple of Christ, you will be equipped to trust Him and to rest in Him all the days of your life as you walk with Him in faith and obedience. Your goal right now is to learn the ways of the Master so intimately that your words, deeds, attitudes, and reactions look just like His. This requires genuine discipleship.

Church family, how does one come to be able to say and believe what Paul wrote in Acts 20:17-32? How do people truly live the way the persecuted believers lived as recorded in Hebrews 11:36-39? The answer lies in discipleship. Through the process of growing to be like Jesus they developed the strength, the faith, the courage, and trust to never let go of Christ. They grew to believe with all of their strength that they had found the pearl of great price that was worth any cost in this life. They had met Jesus personally and He had changed them in their innermost being. That is what it will take to endure until the end. Our days of testing are fast approaching, and we must ready ourselves now. Like the parable of the ten virgins with the oil lamps in Matthew 25:1-13, it is time to fill your lamps. We must not be caught with no oil because we wasted the time God had given us to grow up and get ready.

Will it cost you something to prepare? Yes of course it will. For the team that wins the super bowl or the world series, the cost to practice and prepare is high. There are many sacrifices that must be made along the way. Choices are made daily to pursue that which will strengthen and that which will squander. We are admonished by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 to run this race set before us in such a way that we win. We are encouraged not to waste our energy or resources in useless ways. We are exhorted to discipline ourselves to endure firm to the end. That has been my goal in this sermon and these points to ponder.

I can imagine a scene where we are standing as followers of Christ and the society in which we live has turned on us. They are hurling insults, accusations, threats of bodily harm, and imprisonment. We are given opportunities to compromise the faith. Some of us hold firm to the end while others begin to walk away and turn their backs on Christ and the cross. My heart breaks as I witness some of our own people walking away from Jesus. I wonder if we had grounded them more would they have made it. We must try NOW to strengthen one another so that the anchor holds and our hope in Jesus never waivers. For our King let us stand firm.