

Intentional Discipleship: Personal and In Community – Eph 4:11-16

We started a new series last week called *Core Values: Who we are, What we do*. Core values, meaning the characteristics of our church that define us and drive us. Or, the qualities and attributes that describe who we are and what we do, at the core. From bold preaching, passionate worship, and fervent prayer; to courageous evangelism, intentional discipleship, and strategic church planting.

And to the extent we keep them in the forefront of our minds, we will abide by them; and unite around them. To the extent we don't, we will default to what's convenient and easy.

Intro

So this week, our focus is intentional discipleship, personal and in community. It's all over the Bible, but passages like Eph 4:11-16 emphasize it. So if you haven't already, let's turn there.

➤ Having just preached on this text earlier this year, I'm only going to *highlight* the things that pertain to discipleship, and then bring some *other* passages to bear. But I do want to read it, because this is the primary text on which intentional discipleship is based.

After saying that God has given us *all* gifts, Paul says in v11 . . .

[11] *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers* [or pastors], [12] *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

[15] *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.* (ESV)

➤ That's the discipleship. Equipping *the saints for the work of ministry*; v12. And that *ministry* is discipleship; the ministry that the *saints* are to do and be all about. Just like Jesus said in Mt 28 – go and make *disciples*. God raises up pastors, to disciple the saints, so that they can disciple others.

Which is why the **mission** of our church is *to glorify God through the fulfillment of The Great Commission in the spirit of The Great Commandment*. We exist to magnify the goodness and greatness of God, by making disciples; fulfilling The Great Commission. Introducing people to Christ, and growing them up in Christ. *Leading* them to Jesus, and making them devoted *followers* of Jesus.

Why? To build up the church, v12. Increase our unity, maturity, and Christlikeness, v13. Solidify our convictions, v14. Broaden our growth, v15. And infuse the church with love, v16. The *motivation* for discipleship is Jesus – go do it he says; the process is equipping; and the purpose is growth.

➤ And that growth is not only emphasized *corporately* in the Bible, like here in Ephesians; that *we* are to grow up in every way, as a body. But it's emphasized

individually as well. In 2 Pet 1:5-8.

[5] *For this very reason* [your holiness; my holiness], *make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue* [goodness, uprightness], *and virtue with knowledge* [knowledge of God and his ways], [6] *and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness* [perseverance in the faith], *and steadfastness with godliness*, [7] *and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love* [sacrificial love]. [8] *For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* It's growth upon growth.

And when you put it all together, from Mt 28, to Eph 4, to 2 Pet 1 . . .

Discipleship is the life-long process of growing and maturing as a follower of Christ.

Growing in knowledge, and maturing in application. Growing in your grasp of God's Word, and living it out with more and more consistency. Growing in sanctification, and maturing in discernment.

All of which is a process. We don't go from 0 to 60 overnight; the moment we're saved. And we don't *stop* at 60. We *never* stop growing and maturing. At least we shouldn't. Otherwise the qualities we just saw in 2 Peter won't be *increasing* as he says. Nor will we pass them on to others; disciple others.

It's a life-long process. Of both receiving and imparting the things of God.

➤ Like **teaching and being taught**, all that Jesus commanded. 3 quick aspects of discipleship. First, is being *taught* all that the Bible says, and teaching it to others as well. At the same time. Teaching and being taught who God is, what he does, and what he requires. Teaching and being taught all that you need to know to grow. All that you need to do, to mature.

Second, discipleship is **equipping and being equipped**. For the work of ministry. The joyful labor of discipling others. It's learning and practicing the one another's of ministry. It's receiving the best how-to's in walking with God, and passing them on to others. Like how to study God's Word. How to identify and develop your spiritual gifts. How to witness. How to defend your faith. Discipleship is equipping and *being* equipped, for the work of ministry.

And third, it's **encouraging and being encouraged**. Encouraged to rest in all that God promises. And obey all that God says. And revel in all that he gives. It's encouraging and being encouraged to see things biblically; and love deeply; and live for an audience of one.

Discipleship is the life-long process of growing and maturing as a follower of Christ, by receiving and imparting the things of God. Which is why our core value is *intentional* discipleship. Because there's a lot to cover, and it takes a lot of time. That's the next thought I want you to know and embrace.

Discipleship takes a lot of time and effort.

Time *and* effort. Both. Fail to grasp that, and you'll probably quit. Fail to manage your expectations for what it will *cost*, and you'll probably give up.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor in WWII Germany, who was executed in a Nazi concentration camp, for his plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler. But not before he wrote a book titled, “The Cost of Discipleship.” The gist of which, is that salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you everything. An ethic he tirelessly worked at in life, and modeled in death.

We have to *work* at discipleship. Apply ourselves. Spend and be spent. Because it doesn’t just happen. Just because you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, doesn’t mean you’re growing. Just because you’re a disciple by grace through faith, doesn’t mean you’re maturing. Just because you’ve known the Lord for 20 years, doesn’t mean you’ve moved on from milk.

If only we could put our Bible under our pillow and let it sink in while we sleep! If only we could ride the coattails of somebody else. But it doesn’t work that way, does it?

Just like kids don’t grow without eating, we don’t grow without discipleship; eating *spiritual* food. And just like food doesn’t magically appear on the dinner table, discipleship doesn’t magically happen in church. We have to be *intentional*.

➤ Intentional first of all, on our *own*. **Personally**. Discipleship takes a lot of *personal* time and effort. As we read our Bible each day. And pray. And memorize Scripture. And read good books. And think. It takes a lot of intentional time and effort *personally*.

And, **in community**. As we gather to learn and sharpen one another. Because we don’t always want to, but we *do* desperately need it. We’re not islands unto ourselves. Nor can iron sharpen iron as Proverbs says, if it never touches. (Prov 27:17) If all you do is read and study on your own, your thoughts will be dull, your growth will be stunted, and you’ll impact no one.

On the other hand, if it’s only in *community* that you read your Bible and pray, you’ll be like the man in James 1:24 who looks at his face in a mirror, but forgets what he sees the moment he steps away. The moment you *leave* Small Group or Bible Study.

It takes both. Intentional discipleship, *personally*; and intentional discipleship in *community*. Because both are God’s design, and both take a lot of time and effort.

➤ The question is how. *How* should we be intentional? Practically speaking.

The answer comes down to 4 practices.

Intentional discipleship depends on 4 practices

4 habits. 4 routines. 4 absolutes. Do these 4 things on a consistent basis, and you will *grow* as a disciple. Guaranteed. Fail to do them, and you won’t. You’ll stagnate, stumble, and fall away; die on the vine and miss out. It’s true. So be sure to practice these things.

Starting with this:

• Worship in church

That’s the first practice on which discipleship depends. Worship in God’s place, with God’s people, for God’s praise. The place we gather every single week to focus our mind’s attention, our heart’s affection, and our will’s submission on God. The place we lift our voices in praise and our eyes to the Lord, in community. The place we open our

hearts and apply our minds to the preaching of God’s Word.

Worship in church. Because discipleship starts here and ends here. It starts here as fuel for your fire, and ends here with a party; every single week. Do you realize that? Part of the reason we gather is to celebrate God’s goodness and grace to grow and mature us. Just we celebrate his goodness and grace at birthdays. Worship in church because discipleship starts and ends here.

➤ Not only that, but **Hebrews 10:24-25** tells us to. Tells us to worship in church. Saying – *Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Don’t fail to meet together. Pretty straightforward. Don’t fail to worship together because it’s encouraging; and inspiring; and necessary. Don’t fall into the habit of those who stay home or play golf. Or watch online and check it off. Come together in *church*. That’s the idea.

And do so all the more as the day of *judgment* approaches; the day of Christ’s return; the day of salvation. Implying that we *need* it more and more. The worse things get and the more time passes, the more we should gather.

➤ Plus, it’s a blessing. It’s a blessing to worship in church. **Ps 84:4** says – *Blessed are those who dwell in your house* [speaking to God], *ever singing your praise!* There’s a *blessing* that comes with worshipping in church. Not the least of which is joy. The joy of the Lord that gives us strength. It’s intangible, but real.

And no wonder there’s a blessing. Worship is what God deserves, worship is what God requires, and worship is how we’re wired. We are *wired* to glorify God, and *required* to glorify God. And while there’s a *personal* aspect to it, every day of the week, the corporate shouldn’t be forgotten. The crowd shouldn’t be forsaken. Church shouldn’t be abandoned.

➤ Unfortunately, more people than ever before are *failing* in this practice. Some out of fear. Some due to busyness. Some laziness. And a bunch because of complacency. They just don’t care.

Whatever the case, it’s not good. Even worshipping “virtually.” Online. You know what that’s like? It’s like trying to eat dinner with your family over Zoom; you in one place and them in another. With only one mic and one monitor on. It might suffice every now and then, but after a while it’s just watching people eat.

Better to worship in *church*. Better to gather *with* the saints. Better to be in such close proximity that we’re *aware* of one another, and *encouraged* by each other, and *blessed*.

Second . . .

• Grow in groups

That’s the second practice on which intentional discipleship depends. Grow in groups; *small* groups. Like those in **Acts 2:46** who met in *homes* for discipleship.

Day by day [it says], *attending the temple together* [church] *and breaking bread in their*

homes [small groups], *they received their food with glad and generous hearts*. Their physical food, and their spiritual food. They worshipped together in church, and grew in groups that met in homes.

Because that's where the rubber meets the road. That's where we begin to *apply* the truth we receive in church. That's where we're encouraged. That's where we're held accountable to live a life worthy of the Gospel.

If you don't meet in smaller groups of people for the purpose of discipleship, you won't grow and go. You won't do what God wants, and you won't grow in your relationship with him. Or anybody else for that matter. The person who thinks otherwise is self-deceived, insecure, or living in denial.

So find a group and get plugged in. A Small Group that meets in someone's home, a Men's group that meets right here, a Women's ministry group, a Freedom Group, a college group, whatever. All of our ministries are centered around small groups. So that you can be *intentional* about your discipleship, and *grow up in every way into him who is the head*. (Eph 4:15)

Third . . .

- **Serve in ministry**

Intentional discipleship depends on serving in ministry. Doing something that builds the church *up*, instead of tears it down or ignores it. Like Paul said in v12 – God gave *the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints . . . for building up the body of Christ*. Saints are to serve saints in God's design. One another.

Which is different than growing in groups. Serving in Coram Deo Kids is different than joining a Small Group. One pours out, the other takes in. And both are necessary. We need to grow in groups *and* serve in ministry.

Because a river's not a river, full of life and health, unless it has both an inflow *and* an outflow. All intake and no outflow is a swamp. While all outflow and no intake is a desert. We need *both* to reach the fullness of Christ. *Both* to reach mature manhood. (13)

So whatever you do, find a place to serve. A place to bless others on a consistent basis, and build up the body of Christ. You can go to our website, check something off on the Connection Card, call the church office, or speak to one of our pastors in the lobby. Whatever you do, don't just sit. Serve in ministry for your sake *and* ours.

And last . . .

- **Abide in Christ**

In order to be *intentional* about discipleship, abide in Jesus. Stay connected to him; next to him; near to him. Abide in him spiritually; and relationally; and emotionally. Because that's where the provision is, that's where the protection is, and that's where the fruit is; the fruit of discipleship.

Like Jesus said in **John 15:5** – *I am the vine; you are the branches*. [I'm the *source* of everything good and necessary.] *Whoever abides in me and I in him* [whoever's connected to me in close relationship], *he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing*. As in nothing that advances the kingdom. Nothing related to discipleship.

Jesus is saying you can serve in ministry, and belong to a group, and go to church all you want, but it's all for naught if you don't *abide* in him. If you don't draw *near* to him. If you don't lean in and look up.

It's the 4th practice on which intentional discipleship depends. Worship in church, grow in groups, serve in ministry, and abide in Christ. It's who we are and what we do.

Pray – Lord, spur us on. Spur us on to grow and mature. Spur us on to *be* taught, and to teach others. Spur us on to spend the time and make the effort; to grow on our own, and in community. Add fuel to our fire and joy to our praise.

You Are Loved