

Path of Discipleship

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[0 : 00] So, the first of these three aspects of discipleship is the aspect of information. Discipleship begins with having the right information.

And you see that from the first moments that Jesus called His disciples, the very first thing that Jesus began to do with them was to teach them. And He spent a lot of time teaching them. And what Jesus is doing there is He's entrusting, He's entrusting all that God desires to reveal to His people, to His disciples, who will then go on and become apostles.

And what is an apostle? The word apostle has a very cool meaning. It means a cargo ship, right? So, you put precious cargo on this ship, and the ship has one job, deliver the cargo.

And that's what the apostles were tasked with doing. Take this precious body of teaching that you've received from Jesus and deliver it faithfully to all of the people that need to hear it, right?

[1 : 01] So, the model from the very beginning was for one generation to pass this teaching on to the next generation. And in Ephesians 4, our first passage, Paul says, and He, and He's talking about Jesus here, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and the teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

All of these people play specific roles in delivering that cargo, right? They all place...they have specific jobs to do, but all of those jobs are related to delivering the teaching of Christ, delivering what God has revealed to those who need to hear it, right?

To the next generation. And eventually, all of these teachings were written down, and they became what we now have in the form of the Bible.

And all throughout the New Testament, we're reminded how important it is that our doctrine is rooted in the teachings of the apostles, the teachings that they received from Jesus.

Make sure that you are rooted in the teachings of the apostles. This we see again and again and again, right? So, the word for that, the word for beliefs that are rooted in the teachings of the apostles as revealed from Christ, there's a shorthand word for that, and that word is orthodoxy.

[2 : 23] Rooted in orthodoxy. So, orthodoxy means teaching beliefs that align with all that God has revealed in Christ through the teachings of the apostles and recorded in Scripture.

That's a basic way of understanding the word orthodoxy. So, another way of saying this, the first point would be this. What's the right information that you need to be a disciple? Well, mature disciples are rooted in orthodoxy.

When disciples are not rooted in orthodoxy, one of the ways that you can tell is what Paul talks about here in Ephesians chapter 4. He says, here's a symptom of a believer who's immature because they don't have the right information.

They're not rooted in orthodoxy. He says they're, quote, like children, tossed to and fro. Now, Jesus says that we are called to have a childlike faith, right?

And a childlike faith is good. Be open. Be eager. Be hungry. Be genuine, right? Be receptive, right? Be humble. That's childlike faith. Jesus does not call us to have a childish faith.

[3 : 29] And that's what Paul's talking about here, a childish faith. What does it mean to be childish? Well, you're tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Imagine a little boat on a stormy sea just getting rocked this way and that thrown all over the place, right?

Carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. In other words, what's it mean to be tossed to and fro? What's another word for that? The word's reactionary.

All right, immature disciples are highly reactionary. So, you know, new ideas come along. In every generation, new ideas come along. And always there are these problems in society and the older

ways of trying to solve the problems aren't working.

And so new ideas come along, new worldviews, new philosophies, and they say, we've got the answer. We're going to solve these problems in society better than anybody before us. We finally figured it out, right?

And so in every generation, there are people who get really excited about that. They jump fully on board. It kindles their imagination. They say, finally, human beings have progressed enough that we have figured it out. We've got the answer. And they go all in on these ideas, right?

[4 : 33] And so you have Christians who look at the new ideas, the new philosophies, and they say, you know, our faith is archaic. The Bible was written so long ago. All of this is outdated. This is what we need to be doing right now.

And they will abandon the teachings of the apostles and go full in on whatever the new idea might be, right? So that's one way of being tossed to and fro, right? But then you have other people who react in the kind of opposite way, that they respond to any new idea with such fear, with such suspicion, with such trepidation that they won't even enter in.

They won't even have the conversation. And so those are both ways that you can be tossed to and fro. And they're opposite reactions, but both of them indicate immaturity because they both represent people who are being tossed to and fro as new ideas come to the table.

And mature disciples, according to Paul, mature disciples, by contrast, are people who are rooted and grounded in their theology. You know, they know the Bible.

They have strong, clear convictions. They're committed to seeing everything and thinking through it biblically and doing that with every idea, whether it's a new idea or an old idea.

[5 : 42] You know, progressives tend to prefer newer ideas and assume they're better.

Conservatives tend to prefer older ideas. But a truly biblically orthodox disciple is going to say, you know, every idea, I need to hold this idea up to Scripture, see where it lines up, see where it departs.

Right? So the first point that we see is this. Spiritual maturity requires doctrinal maturity, which means you're rooted in orthodoxy. And this is the problem with any church movement that seeks to revise historic Christian teaching.

I mean, you know, these days you have progressive churches that have more or less replaced orthodoxy with postmodernism. And there's this idea that, well, there's just different kinds of Christians with different kinds of beliefs, and some are progressive and some are conservative. What we need to remember is the Bible doesn't operate with those categories. The Bible has a different set of categories. You're either rooted in orthodoxy or you're not. And according to Paul, if you're not rooted in orthodoxy, you're not going to grow.

You're not going to mature. In fact, not only are you going to remain immature, but you're going to wither on the vine. And so this is the problem. One of the first things that we need to be thinking about is, are we rooted in orthodoxy?

[6 : 49] Right? Are we committed to growing together in orthodoxy? The other problem that we need to recognize, though, and the thing that we can't overlook, is what Paul says in verse 15. He says, you know, we do all this with a posture of love.

As we're growing together, we're speaking the truth in love. Now, love doesn't mean compromising orthodoxy, but it also means this. It's not just about holding the right doctrine. It's not just about checking all of the theological boxes.

It matters how we hold it and how we engage with people with whom we disagree. You can have the right theology, but if you're smug or self-righteous or condescending, there's no love in that, and that's a sign of immaturity.

You know, it may sound extreme to say this, but, you know, Satan could very well hold a PhD in systematic theology, but there's no love in him. Right? So, Paul says, you need to be orthodox, but you need to... Another sign of maturity is you hold your theology, you extend your theology with a posture of love, which means I'm charitable toward you.

I assume the best about your intentions. I assume the best about you. I'm for you, ultimately. I want what's best for you. That's what he's talking about. So, before we move on, just what does this mean for Advent?

[8 : 03] A culture of discipleship at Advent means that we're all committed to growing together in a faith that's rooted in orthodoxy, that we're committed to growing in our understanding of Scripture and theology, that we recognize that theology isn't something that's reserved for pastors and

graduate students.

Right? That theology is something that every Christian is called to. You're all theologians. So, every Christian is a theologian. And small groups help, I think, and classes can help, but you really have to want it.

This is not something that people can do for you. And, you know, if you have ears to hear, then hear this. I think it's fashionable in our generation for some people to remain perpetually uncertain about certain doctrines, especially when dealing with hot-button issues.

You know, I just don't know what I think about this. I don't really... I've never really looked into that, right? But listen, if you live 30 years like that, your growth is going to be stunted. You know, we're called to have clear convictions that are rooted in orthodoxy, right?

So, the goal is to grow together. The goal is to be rooted in the teachings of the apostles.

Information is a key part of discipleship. That's point one. But there's more.

[9 : 14] It doesn't end there. Outside of information, we need what I think is most helpfully described as imitation. One of the biggest mistakes that we make in the West, I think, especially in kind of Protestant circles, is that we assume that if we simply give people the right information, that will lead to right living.

We just need to educate people. And this isn't just in the church, by the way. This is everybody, right? If there's a social problem, we just need education. And if people just know the right thing to do, then they'll do it.

You know, I think history has proven us wrong a million times on that point. That there's something missing if you just think that people... You know, Jamie Smith, one of my favorite guys, says that we treat people like giant bobbleheads.

You know, the body is almost non-existent, and they have a giant empty head, and you just need to fill it with enough information, and then they'll go out and do the right thing. And he says that's a misunderstanding of how people work, right?

Information is necessary. We just made that point. But it's not sufficient for discipleship. So you can read a lot of books. You can know a lot of theology, but it doesn't impact the way you live your life.

You can know a whole lot of theology, but you may never experience the truth of your beliefs.

[10 : 28] It's all up here. You never feel it. It never impacts your relationships. So we need a way of converting doctrine into experience. You know, your body, you eat food. Your body does a great job of converting that food into nutrients, into energy, into cellular growth.

We need a similar kind of thing in our faith. We need a way of converting the knowledge into experience, into life change. And God's Word, in other words, has to become flesh in our lives.

Right? And for this, we need imitation. Anyone with kids knows how they can pick up on your words, your mannerisms, your behaviors, your habits.

Depending on who you are, that can be exhilarating or completely terrifying. You know, our three-year-old mimics my wife. She will say things. And it sounds exactly like Laura.

Right? Not just the words, but just the whole way she says it. And I'll do a double take. And I'm like, you sounded just like your mom. Right? And that can be exhilarating or it can be terrifying.

[11 : 31] But what this shows us is that human beings learn best through imitation. And we do it without even thinking about it. But the difference is, as we get older, we get more of a choice in whom we imitate.

And that's really important. Right? But this is why Jesus didn't just teach from a hilltop. Here, I'm going to proclaim truth to you. Now go and do the right thing. Right? Jesus did more than that. He invited a small number of people to share his life, to learn by living alongside him, to, in other words, imitate him. And so, for example, we see the disciples at one point, they look over and they see Jesus praying.

And they're like, I've never heard anybody pray like that before, talk to God like that before. And so they all go over and they wait. And when he's done, they say, Master, could you please teach us to pray like that? That's imitation.

I've never prayed like that. Can you show me how to do that the way you do it? That's imitation. And there's so much of that happening in the lives of the disciples. Right? So this is what we see in Jesus. We also see this with Paul.

[12 : 35] Paul didn't just write theology textbooks. Paul regularly, throughout his letters, calls his readers to imitate his life, even as he seeks to imitate Christ.

I love this passage in 1 Corinthians 4. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you have teachers, you have people that you listen to, you know, your favorite podcasts that kind of do the thing, you know, address the topics that you're thinking about.

You have a lot of guides in your life, but you don't have many fathers. What's the difference in Paul's mind between a guide and a father? A father's a role model. Somebody you look up to. Somebody you say, man, I want to be just like him. Paul says, you don't have many people like that in your life. Let me be that person for you. And then as if there's any doubt, he says, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

I urge you then, be imitators of me. He's very explicit here. There's no doubt what he's talking about. Now, Paul doesn't mean that we should imitate him instead of Christ. He's not setting himself up and saying, you know, Jesus was good, but you should really be like me.

[13:37] The goal is to imitate Christ. And in fact, earlier in the same letter, Paul chastises these same people for turning certain leaders like Apollos into celebrities, right?

He says, you know, you're focusing too much on Apollos and not enough on Christ. But he's also saying, if you want to be like Christ, you need to be able to imitate qualities in other people that point you to Christ.

And he says, look at me. Imitate those things in my life that point you to Christ. And you know, when I look at my own faith, I was thinking a lot about this as I was writing the sermon. When I look at my own faith, when I look at my own story, I see a collage of people who have profoundly influenced me.

People who, as I stand here right now, 43 years old at a church, I think back to these people and I think, man, I want to be more like him. I want to be more like her. You know, I see my dad, his commitment to making sure that my brother and I, and then my sister, that we were worshiping in church together.

You know, rain or shine, his commitment to making sure that was happening. You know, and so much of that time, listen, so much of that time, I did not want to be there. And if you're a kid here and you don't want to be here, I totally feel it.

[14:54] I totally get you. But here's what happened. Later in life, later in life, when I came to mature faith, that was, it was like God had laid kindling in my life for years.

And all it took was a spark and it all lit fire. And that investment of being in church with my dad all those years, all of the sermons, all of that teaching, believe it or not, all came back. And I felt like I had this rich history of faith.

It took me till college for that thing to catch. But once it caught, it burned hot because of all of that time, right? The times that my dad stayed up with us reading books like Chronicles of Narnia, you know, forming our imaginations and helping us imagine what God is like.

Right? I think of my old pastor, Hunter. And some of you know Hunter Dockery, right? He's one of the main reasons I'm a pastor. And more than a few people have told me that at times in my preaching, I sound like I'm imitating Hunter.

And I take that as a great compliment. I say, you know, in fact, I am. That's exact. He's one of the first preachers that really impacted me. And I can't, every time I preach, I'm thinking about him in the background. He's there.

[16:00] Right? I think about my old roommate, Kwong Min, who left to go as a missionary to North Korea, to risk his life, to bring the gospel to people in North Korea, right?

I think of my old professor, Dr. Carol Kaminsky. It was through her that I first fell in love with the Old Testament. You know, Kevin had her as well. I mean, she's awesome. She loves the Bible.

And when I saw the Old Testament through her eyes, I fell in love with it for the first time. It had always been intimidating to me. And as she opened it up, it was like a key in a lock. And I fell in love with it.

Now, I see the men that I lived with in a house in Salem, Massachusetts, who woke me up at 6 a.m. every single morning to do morning prayer.

And man, I hated it. And then I loved it. I hated it. And then I loved it. Just one day, the switch flipped. And I loved it. And that was the first time I really began to fall in love with common prayer, morning prayer.

[16:58] I'd never done it before. You know, I think of my friends Patrick and Esau, both from seminary, who are both Anglican priests. Part of the reason I'm Anglican and not the denomination I grew up in is because I really wanted to follow in their footsteps and be like them.

I thought they were amazing, and I loved their tradition. So I wanted to be part of that tradition. You know, I see my bishop. Some of you don't know Bishop Steve, but every single meeting we have, even if it's a totally business-oriented meeting, almost every meeting I've ever had with Steve, he begins with Scripture.

And he always begins, not with some prepared speech, but he just shares a few thoughts about the passage that he was reading that morning. Because no matter what is happening in his life, he is always beginning the day by reading Scripture.

And I think, man, I want to be like that. You know? Last example, I see my wife, who, quite honestly, has done more to build bridges with our neighbors and to love people in our community than almost anyone else I know.

Way more than I have. And I think, man, I wish I had a heart like that. You know, this is just a few, and, you know, for the sake of time, I'm going to cut myself off. But listen, I could go on and on and on and on the people that have influenced my faith.

[18:07] Anything, here's the point, anything worthwhile in my faith is the product of someone else's influence on my life. That's the point.

And that's going to be true for anybody who's a Christian. So does that mean that these people are perfect? No. Except for my wife, but for everybody else, no. But there are qualities in each of these people that point me to Christ.

You know, qualities that I look at and I say, man, I really want to imitate that in you. I really want to be more like that. I want to go stronger in my faith in that way. And I think this is one of the biggest missing pieces in the way we think about discipleship.

Right? What this means at Advent is we need to be able to learn to see Christ in other people and things in other people that point us to Christ. Right? Now, you're better at doing that if you're rooted in orthodoxy.

So you're knowing what to look for. But we need to learn to look at people and say, wow, you know, you're not perfect and there are ways that God is at work in you right now and you're growing. But man, this thing in you, when you pray, I just feel like you have this relationship with God that I want.

[19:11] You know? You're so good at managing your time. You're able to have a week of Sabbath every week. You're able to keep a Sabbath. And even though you work as much as the rest of us, somehow you manage it better.

How do you do that? Right? So this is what I would love to see more at Advent. I would love to see more of this happening. We're called to follow Jesus, but we need pace setters.

Somebody who's just a little bit further than you down the road in one way or another. So if you want to learn how to study Scripture and actually understand it and have it nourish you, find somebody who does that really well and read the Bible with them.

If you want to learn how to pray, find someone who has a rich prayer life and pray with them. If you want to learn how to manage your time better, find someone who keeps a weekly Sabbath and then copy their day planner.

You know, just for a few weeks. Just do whatever they do and see how it works out for you. I guarantee you, if you're keeping a weekly Sabbath, you're better at time management than 90% of the people out there. You have to be.

[20:11] You have to get it all done in six days. Sometimes this means you're regularly meeting with somebody, you know, every week and you're downloading your life and all of that. But much more often, it doesn't mean that. Sometimes it just means observing somebody from afar and then seeking to imitate them or sitting down with them over coffee and saying, hey, could you just tell me how you do this?

You know, the last point I'll make about this before we move on is, as Anglicans, this is why we value liturgy. It's why we value the book of common prayer. It's why we value the lives of the saints. Through the liturgy, we imitate the worship of Christians who came before us. Through the book of common prayer, we imitate the prayers of Christians who came before us.

I have learned how to pray through the book of common prayer. Through the lives of the saints, we imitate the lives of Christians who came before us. The saints didn't live perfect lives.

But there are things in their lives worthy of imitation, and so they act as pace setters for the church. That's essentially what it means for the church to recognize a saint. This is a pace setter.

[21:16] This is somebody you should pay attention to. This is somebody in whose life there are things you should imitate. All right? So discipleship must involve information. It must involve

imitation. It's not just self-improvement.

It's not just so I feel better about myself. All right? The goal of all of this is improvisation. And you say, well, what do you mean improvisation? And that sounds like just kind of making it up as we go along.

Isn't that the problem? Aren't too many people doing that? And in fact, it means the opposite of that. Let me ask you this. What does Christian faithfulness look like in the 21st century? Right?

What does Christian faithfulness look like in the age of Amazon and Tender and Fortnite and TikTok? What does Christian faithfulness look like in response to all that's happened this past year? Right? With COVID, politics. What does Christian faithfulness look like? You know, if you expect to be able to look to the Bible to give you a script for life in the 21st century, you're going to be sorely disappointed.

[22 : 22] The Bible was written thousands of years ago and simply does not directly address many of the challenges that we face on a daily basis. There's no verse in the Bible that tells you, here's how you should think about iPhones.

And that's really frustrating if you're wanting that, right? And we all kind of want something like that to tell us what to do. How do I raise my kids in the age of internet porn? You know, how do we do this?

It's hard. The good news is that's not the Bible's intent. It was never meant to be a script for life. And this is why we have discipleship. Christian faithfulness is something every generation of disciples must discern for themselves.

That's what Paul's talking about in Romans chapter 12. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world. In other words, don't imitate the ways of the world. That's not an example to follow. But be transformed by the renewal of your mind through word, spirit, through imitation and information.

[23 : 33] Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Why? Here's the goal. That by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. The point of discipleship is to develop the capacity to discern the will of God and to know how to be faithful, no matter what circumstances we face.

The word for that is improvisation. Dan used a wonderful illustration last week to help us visualize what this actually looks like in practice.

Because Dan is a trained musician, trained jazz musician. And so he talked about the example of jazz improv. And if you think a jazz musician is up there just kind of making it up with, you know, you've completely misunderstood how it works, right?

The only way a jazz musician can improvise, which means playing with no sheet music, right, is because they spend hours learning the right information.

They learn all the music theory. They learn all, you know, Dan rattled it all off last week. I don't even know because I don't have the right information. But they learn the right information. And then they spend hours imitating other jazz musicians.

[24 : 43] I mean, Dan talked about when he was being trained kind of, you know, meticulously writing every note to these jazz solos. You know, learning them note by note. You know, pause by pause. And they spend hours doing this, information, imitation.

And what that does is it develops in them instincts that enable them to improvise in the moment. They learn how to improvise from all that time spent. And so Christian faithfulness is like jazz improv.

The goal of discipleship is to make music with our lives that glorifies God. No sheet music required. That's the goal. All of your life is like a song of worship to God that you play without sheet music. You're responding out of those biblical instincts in the moment in unprecedented, unknown, unscripted challenges. And you're responding with faithfulness. You're testing and discerning the will of God in every circumstance you face.

That's the goal. Your life glorifies God as a result. So as we read our Bibles, as we pray, as we fast, as we practice the spiritual disciplines, we're developing biblical instincts that we need to make that possible.

