

EQUIP – THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

From time to time, lobsters have to leave their shells in order to grow. Their shells help to protect them, yet when they grow, the old shell must be abandoned. If they did not abandon it, the old shell would soon become their prison. The tricky part for the lobster is the brief period of time between when the old shell is discarded and the new one is formed. During that time they are vulnerable, the transition must be scary to the lobster. There are always schools of fish ready to eat them. I am sure that during this time of growth that old shell must look pretty good. We are not so different from lobsters. To change and grow requires effort. There are times we must sometimes shed our shells – the ideas and routines they we are comfortable with. Discipleship means being so committed to Christ that when he bids us to follow, we will change, risk, grow, and leave everything behind.

Today we are continuing in our series called The Four Chairs looking at our mission statement. We have talked about the great commandment, to love God and to love people. We exist as a church to exalt God and embrace one another. Today we want to look at our third priority taking from the great commission. We exist to equip ourselves for service.

Luke 14:25-33 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters -- yes, even his own life -- he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

1. Spiritual Growth is a CHOICE

Spiritual growth does not just happen automatically. It is intentional. It is a choice that we have to make. There are people that have been going to church for many years but are still babies spiritually.

Hebrews 5:11-12 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

Spiritual growth is intentional. It requires commitment and effort to grow. A person must want to grow, decide to grow, and make an effort to grow. It is a choice.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed -- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence -- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Notice that Paul says that we need to “work out” our salvation. He does not say to “work on” your salvation, that is a finished work through Jesus on the cross. It means that, since you have been saved, start acting like it.

Jesus has done His part in saving us so now it is up to us to do our part to do everything we can to actively grow in our faith. Becoming like Christ is the result of the commitments we make. We become whatever we are committed to! Just as a commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a great church, it is also the way to grow a great Christian. Without a commitment to grow, and growth that occurs will be circumstantial, rather than intentional.

A single middle aged man went on a Caribbean cruise. On the first day out he noticed an attractive woman about his age who smiled at him in a friendly way as he passed her on the deck. That night he managed to get seated at the same table with her for dinner. As the conversation developed, he commented that he had seen her on the deck that day and he had appreciated her friendly smile. When she heard this she smiled and commented, "Well, the reason I smiled was that when I saw you I was immediately struck by your strong resemblance to my third husband." At this he perked up his ears and said, "Oh, how many times have you been married?" She looked down at her plate, smiled demurely, and answered, "Twice." That is a woman who has a plan!

Growth requires commitment. You have to have a plan. Spiritual growth is intentional. You must make a choice to grow. I don't know how to say it any clearer than this. If you want to be a spiritual baby your entire life, then that is your choice. We grow by making commitments. There are 4 different ways in which people commit themselves to this church;

The first level of commitment is called the CROWD. This means you attend the worship service. It is called the crowd because there are a LOT of people at this level. We see this in the life of Jesus. As He was with people there was interest. When people asked about Him the invitation was given to come and see. Find out who I am. Spend time with me.

John 1:38-39 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 Come, he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

As people come and commit themselves to the services we then ask for the next level of commitment. This second level of commitment is called the CONNECTED. I love to see people make this jump. This means you join a small group. You choose to get connected with a group of people for spiritual encouragement. Peter and Andrew had already spent time with Jesus for many months, but then Jesus comes and invites them into a group, into a deeper relationship.

Mark 1:16-18 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 Come, follow me, Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

They went from being fishermen who simply knew Jesus to being part of a group. There was new belonging and purpose. They were connected.

As they continued to walk with Jesus, Jesus kept calling them into a deeper level of commitment. The third level of commitment is called the COMMITTED. This means you get involved in an intentional discipleship program where you seek to learn and then apply the truths of the Bible.

Luke 6:12-13 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. 13 When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:

Jesus took some of them and started an intensive training program. He would teach them and then send them out to practice what they had just learned.

Eventually we move on to the next level. The fourth level of commitment is the CORE. These are people who have moved from just feeding themselves to start feeding others. This means getting involved in some area of service which could mean ushering, joining the worship team or leading a small group.

Matthew 28:18-20 Then 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."

These Apostles went from being taught to teaching. From being served to serving. They took what Jesus had given them and gave it to others. We rely on core people to run this church from week to week. If they did not do their jobs we could not be here. CORE people understand their gifting and life mission. These are people who have really gotten a hold of God's plan for their life and they have found an area to serve. They understand God's calling on their life and are seeking to use their gifts to go out into the world and make a difference. Ultimately this is the chair that we would like to see everyone in the church sitting on. So what chair are you on this morning?

2. Spiritual growth is CONSECUTIVE

You can see that these four steps of commitment are sequential, They are consecutive. One step follows the next. Spiritual growth is not simply a choice but an intentional process. Like the steps of a ladder, they move in a certain direction. If you say, "I'm going to go on a diet," it helps to have some sort of a plan to follow, steps to achieve your goal. This is true of spiritual growth also. You need to have a clear process to follow. This process is based on increasing levels of commitment.

We know that children grow through developmental stages. We know that they learn to breathe first. Then they learn to eat. Then they learn to walk. Then they learn to talk. The same is true in your spiritual life. You grow in stages. These steps can be summarized like this: Knowing Christ, then Loving Christ, then Growing in Christ, then Serving and Sharing Christ. That is the order of learning.

In the passage that we read this morning, we see that Jesus told us that being His disciple comes at a cost. It requires dedication, sacrifice and commitment.

Luke 14:26 If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters -- yes, even his own life -- he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

We see this in the life of Jesus. As the disciples walked with Him He was continually turning up the heat on what it meant to be His disciple. There were those who responded by moving to a deeper level of commitment, and there were those who walked away.

John 6:66-69 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 67 You do not want to leave too, do you? Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

In your life have you found this to be true as well? Have you found that the longer you walked with Jesus the more He has entrusted you with? The more is required of you? The greater the challenge?

The late A. W. Tozer once wrote "Think about people who find themselves in religious ruts. They discover a number of things about themselves. They will find that they are getting older but not getting any holier. Time is their enemy, not their friend. The time they trusted and looked to is betraying them, for they often said to themselves, "The passing of time will help me. I know some good old saints, so as I get older I'll get holier and better. Time will help me, purify me and revive me." They said that the year before last, but they were not helped any last year. Time betrayed them. They were not any better last year than they had been the year before."

The Christian walk is much like riding a bicycle; we are either moving forward or falling off. --
Robert Tuttle

So let me ask you a simple question, do you have a systematic intentional thought out process for your spiritual growth. What are you doing in your life to stay fresh, to keep growing in your relationship with Christ?

One of the most popular salt water aquarium fish is the shark. If you catch a small shark and put it in an aquarium, it will stay a size proportionate to that aquarium. Sharks can be six inches long yet fully matured. But if you turn them loose in the ocean, they grow to their normal length of eight feet. That also happens to some Christians. I've seen the cutest little six-inch Christians who swim around in a little puddle. But if you put them into a larger arena -- into the whole creation -- only then can they become great.

E.g. Japan missions trip – they went from the puddle to the ocean.

3. Spiritual Growth is a COMMAND

Any believer can grow to maturity if he or she will develop the habits necessary for spiritual growth. Paul often compared training for the Christian life to the way athletes stay in shape. The path to spiritual fitness is as practical as the path to physical fitness. Spiritual fitness is simply a matter of learning certain spiritual exercises and being disciplined to do them until they become habits. Character is shaped by the habits we develop.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

These words of Paul to Timothy are not just suggestions, and neither are the words of Jesus to us. Notice what Jesus says at the end of the passage we read today;

Luke 14:33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Total commitment is not an option, it is God's expectation. Spiritual growth is not optional for us, it is commanded. God expects us to bear fruit as Christians. He expects to see a harvest in our lives.

No one plants an apple tree without expecting to get apples. No one plants a grape vine without expecting to get grapes. Farmers plant crops expecting to receive a harvest. That is why it is important that we do not enter into a relationship with Christ lightly. You cannot have Jesus as saviour of your life until He is first Lord of your life. That means that He calls the shots.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

When Naomi and I lived on the Doulos we were reminded of this constantly. The word Doulos is the Greek word meaning slave. To be a Christian is to be a slave for Jesus.

Luke 14:28 Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

Do not ask Jesus to be saviour until you are ready to also receive Him as Lord. It has been said that if Jesus is not Lord OF all then He is not Lord AT all. So let me ask you a question, how far are you willing to go for your faith? Is there any area of your life where, if Jesus asked you to do something, you would say no? Are you a slave?

4. Spiritual Growth Requires COMMUNITY

We don't grow in isolation of others we grow in the context of fellowship. We talked about this last week. This is why the 3rd chair is after the second. Community comes first. We only grow in the context of community.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Relationships are the glue that keeps people connected to your church. But relationships play an even more important role in moving people to maturity. They are absolutely essential for spiritual growth.

1 John 1:6-7 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If you don't have regular fellowship with other believers you should seriously question whether or not you are really walking in the light. The quality of our relationship with Christ can be seen in the quality of your relationship to other believers. It takes a variety of spiritual experiences with God to produce spiritual maturity. It is not found simply in the study of truth but in the experience and application of truth. You cannot truly understand what it means to serve someone until you have someone to serve.

The words most used to describe the Christian life are love, give, believe, and serve. Jesus did not say, "I have come that you might study." When the Christian life consists completely of receiving biblical input with no outflow of ministry or evangelism, his or her spiritual growth will stagnate. Impression without expression leads to depression. We need community.

5. Spiritual Growth has a COST

Luke 14:31 Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

Spiritual Growth comes at a price. It will always cost you something. Jesus asked His disciples for commitment, and that is still true today. Everyone here is committed to something. The question isn't whether or not people are going to be committed, but rather who is going to get their commitment. If you've ever been a Little League parent, you know that when your child signed up to play, you were required to make a major commitment in terms of providing refreshments, transportation, trophies, and victory parties in addition to your attendance. There was nothing voluntary about your participation.

So why do people commit themselves in so many different areas of life but then fail to be committed to the most important aspect of their life? We have so many weak Christians because they are half-committed to many causes rather than being totally committed to the things that matter most. A barrier to spiritual growth for many is not lack of commitment, but over-commitment to the wrong things.

The crowds that followed Jesus were positive but uncommitted. He did not make it easy for them to respond positively, He set the cost of discipleship as high as possible and encouraged them to do a careful inventory before declaring their willingness to follow. Those who made the choice to follow whole heartedly grew closer, while those who did not fell away. You cannot be fully committed to Jesus if you don't love Him above all else. Jesus would not have died for you if He didn't love you above all else. God so loved the world... He gave all he had because he loved you above all.

Billy Sunday was a pro Baseball player in the early 1900's who became one of the most famous preachers of his day and laid the groundwork for Billy Graham in Crusade Evangelism. Billy Sunday once said "Stopping at third adds no more to the score than striking out." It doesn't matter how well you start if you fail to finish. What will you be committing?

The difference between the crowd that Jesus spoke to and us is that, for them, following was not simply a spiritual thing but a physical thing. To be a committed disciple of Jesus in His day meant they had to physically leave home, job, and family to follow. Their where no part time disciples. When Jesus called Matthew he had to leave his tax receipts desk; Peter had to leave his boats and nets. It involved a drastic change in lifestyle.

Jesus did not carry a backpack of money around with them. When the disciples followed they took nothing with them. They had to trust in God to provide everything for them. They had to walk by faith. They faced bad weather and hostile crowds and persecution. Let me ask you a simple question, would you have done it? Would you have left it all to follow? Have you left it all to follow?

When I gave my life to Jesus I told him that I would do anything and go anywhere. As a result my life has had some interesting adventures. What are you willing to leave behind to follow? What are you willing to do to follow? If you are going to grow spiritually you need to have a plan. I encourage you to consider where you are at today and consider making a move to the next level of commitment. For some that means getting baptized or joining the church. For some that means joining a small group. For some maybe that means taking a class or being mentored. As you can see from this slide we have some exciting new courses being offered, make sure you take advantage of them. For some it may mean getting involved in joining a ministry team. Whatever that is, I encourage you today to do it.

In May 1855, an eighteen-year-old boy went to the deacons of a church in Boston to be considered for membership. He had been saved through a Sunday School teacher while he was working in a shoe store. When the deacons met with him it was immediately apparent that he knew almost nothing about the bible or spiritual truth, so his application to membership was rejected. As one person put it,

"I can truly say that I have seen few persons whose minds were spiritually darker than was his when he came into my Sunday school class. I think the committee of the church seldom met an applicant for membership who seemed more unlikely ever to become a Christian of clear and decided views of gospel truth, still less to fill any space of public or extended usefulness."

Not a great start, but that 18 year old boy was serious about his faith. He began to learn and was disciplined. A year later in 1856 he reapplied for church membership and was accepted. That young man's name was DL Moody, who became one of the greatest evangelists of all time.