

DISCIPLESHIP II – THE INSIDE OF THE CUP

- 1) So far in this curriculum, we have discussed what is necessary in order for a person to be transformed into Christlikeness. Bringing about this transformation in other people is Jesus's top priority. And He made sure that His disciples made it their top priority as well. Here were their marching orders at His departure:
 - a) *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Matthew 28:18-20
 - b) What was the great commission? Go and make disciples. Not converts. Not people who have changed their minds to some particular point of view. But disciples.
 - i) It begs the question, what is a disciple? Dallas Willard offers this definition: a **disciple of Jesus** is someone who is learning from Him how to lead their life as He would lead their life if He were they.
 - ii) This means that discipleship has to do with the type of life we are living.
- 2) Now, the issue that this raises, is that there are so many people coming to church week in and week out who have never been given the opportunity, or in some cases have never taken the opportunity to be discipled by Jesus. What about them?
 - a) Well, that is a tricky question because there are all sorts of different kinds of people in that "churchy but not discipley" group.
 - b) On the really sorry end of the spectrum would be people with no commitment to Christian living whatsoever. Often, these types of people have taken the approach they have because they have heard something along these lines, *for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9) And they take that to mean... "That's justification by faith alone. It's not by works. I believe in Jesus, I asked for forgiveness. Therefore, I am now in the good books."
 - c) Now, believing certain facts about Jesus, and then asking for His forgiveness is good and necessary. But that, all by itself, without any change in the actual life we are living, is not faith in Jesus.
 - i) Faith in Jesus requires placing our confidence in what Jesus taught and commanded.
 - (1) For instance, when *Hebrews (11)* deals with faith, it insists that genuine faith always results in action on our part. *By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born*, is one of many examples it gives. *By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family* is another.
 - ii) The point is, if we trust God, our lives will look a certain way, won't they?
 - (1) For instance, the Bible is very clear that if cooperation with sin is the overall and consistent state of a person's life, then actually, they don't have faith in Jesus. They are cut off from Him.
 - (2) *"No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him."* 1 John 3:6

- (a) Jesus put it like this: *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 7:21.*
 - (b) We might say that we have faith, or say a particular prayer, or recite a particular creed, but that's just words. We say things that we don't mean all the time. What we have done gets to the heart of the matter, in a way that our words do not.
 - (c) That is why in *the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46)*, and in many other New Testament passages, the teaching is that Jesus will judge people according to what they have done.
- (3) And Jesus addressed this issue of genuine faith versus lip service with specific examples. For instance, *if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:15.* God will not forgive people who obstinately refuse to forgive others. And the reason He won't is because they don't want to be forgiven. At least with the kind of forgiveness that God offers. God's forgiveness is not a get-out-of-Hell-free card. Sin is dehumanizing, destructive. God hates it, and always wars against it. His forgiveness is not a get you off the hook so you can go around and keep damaging yourself and everyone else and making a mess of the world as you please, to whatever extent you please. God is not an enabler; He is a transformer. Everywhere you look in the Bible, you will see that God's forgiveness is offered as part of an adoption into His family, the start of a new kind of life, and a rescue from the bondage of sin. But if we don't want to be saved from our sin, if we just want to sit down in it and stay there, He will respect that.
- (4) And you will find plenty of similar warnings in the New Testament to any of us obstinately staying put in our sin, of whatever type. *The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21*
- (5) Think of it this way... There has been a gigantic shipwreck and Christ has come by on a rescue boat. The people who are saved from the wreck are the people who, in self-abandoning trust, jump onto Jesus's rescue boat. Not the people who sit on the shipwreck as it sinks and say nice things about believing in Jesus.
- iii) Now, we need to be clear that the children of God are not people who never sin. *1 John (1: 8-10): If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.*
- (1) The Bible insists that, unfortunately, we will continue to sin, and therefore we will always need forgiveness. But the failings of a Christian will occur in the overall context of a life of trust in God and of commitment to Him. Just like it did for those children of God that we went through from the Old Testament a moment

ago. As Paul says, quoting Habakkuk, *the just shall live by faith. Romans 1:17*. In popular Christian thinking, personal holiness is often completely disconnected from salvation. But in the Bible, personal holiness and salvation always go together.

- 3) Now really, sitting in our pews, rather than blatant and recalcitrant sinners, it is more common to find people floating around in the middle of the spectrum. They make some effort to minimize sin in their lives. But they have a marginal commitment to the actual efforts that are required in order to become Christlike and don't pay much attention to the work that Christ has commanded us to do.
 - a) What does the Bible say these people?
 - i) Interestingly, not much. And that is because, as Dallas Willard pointed out, the New Testament was written by disciples, for disciples, and is about discipleship.
 - ii) The promises that the Bible offers are for disciples of Jesus. The house *built not on the sand, but on the rock, (Matthew 5)* is the lived experience of His disciples.
- 4) Now, anyone, anywhere, anytime can choose to be a disciple and start that life. But the issue for these in-between folks is that they hear Jesus's, "*Come, follow me,*" (*Matthew 4:19*), and they think "I don't know if I want to." "I don't know if I will be happy if I do that."
 - a) More specifically, something like this..."It sounds challenging with these spiritual practices and forgiveness and reaching out to others in self-giving love and what not. Aren't we all saved and going to Heaven when we die? If so, why not just take it easy down here on earth in the mean time? Why not just fulfil the minimum requirements to make it through the pearly gates?"
 - b) These are logical and good questions. In particular, their basic question, "is discipleship worth it?" is a crucial and excellent question. After all, we will never undertake an endeavor, unless we think it is worth it.
 - i) For instance, we will need a vision of the goodness and worthwhileness of being in shape, in order to fuel our efforts in regular physical exercise.
 - c) What would my life look like if I was a committed disciple of Christ? Is the life of a disciple an enjoyable life? Would I be missing out on certain things? Would I be miserable?
 - d) Along these lines, CS Lewis once asked...is discipleship to Jesus hard or is it easy? And in exploring this question, he pointed out that at different times, Jesus described discipleship in completely opposite ways.... sometimes as hard, and sometimes as easy.
 - i) *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23*
 - ii) *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Mathew 11:28-30*
 - e) The reason that discipleship can be viewed both as hard and as easy, is because there are two aspects to discipleship. There is a giving up, and there is a getting.
 - i) Now, actually, that is the case with any decision that we make. When you buy a car, for instance, it is also both hard and easy, depending from what perspective you look

at it. On the one hand, there is a giving up, of money. But on the other hand, there is a getting, of a car.

5) Let's discuss the terms of the deal of discipleship. What are we giving up? What are we getting?

i) Let's start by asking, in order to be His disciple, for Him to act as your spiritual master, what does Jesus require of you? A certain amount of your time, a certain amount of your money? No. Instead, He requires all your time. All your money. Everything that you have.

(1) Consider *Luke 14*. It says that *Large crowds were traveling with Jesus*. The word has spread and the masses have really started to follow Jesus around in large numbers and what does He do? He says "Great! Sign them all up! Quick boys, start passing around the collection plates quick before they know what hit them!" No, *turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.*

(a) Who did he think He was, to say that? He continues on...

(2) *And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

(a) What's that about? He is talking about dying. He is talking about the fact that once you chose to follow Him, your old life is over. You have left it behind. What does Paul say about discipleship? "***For your died***, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." *Colossians 3:3*

(3) Jesus continues and explains further, "*Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'*"

(a) Do you know anyone like that? Who start things but tends not to finish them? Doesn't think through ahead of time what it's really going to take to see the thing through? Who gives up when the going gets tough? A lot of people who were following Jesus around ended up being like that.

(4) "*Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 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. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Luke 14:25-35*

(a) Another failure to plan. Do you know anyone like that? "Oh sure, that sounds great! I am definitely going to do that." But no plan as to how they are actually going to do it. And so, when the effort is undertaken, it just becomes a chaotic mess and doesn't amount to anything. Have I made a practical and comprehensive life plan to follow Jesus? Have I restructured my life accordingly?

- (5) And by the way, do you think we should take Jesus's language here literally? That His desire is for you to hate your whole life and hate your family? No. You shouldn't hate them, you should love them, as Jesus Himself did, and as He clearly taught His followers to do many times in many ways.
- (a) So why does He say we are to hate these people and to hate our own lives as well?
 - (b) Well for one thing, there is a precedence of using the Greek word translated hate there, *miseo*, or its Hebrew equivalent, in the Bible and in secular documents not in the sense of despising or detesting, but in meaning simply to love something less than the alternative.
 - (c) Or the other possibility is that it was hyperbole, which Jesus and many other teachers often used in their teaching, in order to be impactful and to make a point.
 - (i) As Dallas Willard pointed out, people did not have pencil and paper or audio recording devices in those days. He had to say things in a way that would stick.
 - (d) In any case, what Jesus is getting at here is that following Him is not like ordering at Burger King. It's not "have it your way."
- (6) But why do you have to put everything else in a position of secondary importance in order to follow Jesus? Why do you have to dedicate your entire life to Him? Well, on the one hand, tradeoffs and choices between alternatives are not unique to following Jesus. You want a spot in the Vienna Philharmonic? You are going to have to make serious and ongoing commitments of time and energy. Above and beyond the countless hours of practice, you might have to move across the World, away from your family. Spend money, take risks, show up on time each recital.
- (a) It's the same with Jesus, but just taken to the final degree. Jesus is the head of the most important and successful organization in the World. Forget the Vienna Philharmonic, that is child's play in comparison. You can't aim any higher than being Jesus's disciple.
 - (b) In fact, the New Testament teaches that Jesus is running the entire universe on God's behalf, including the human project going on down here on planet earth. He is personally directing and organizing God's rescue plan for humanity.
 - (i) That is why Jesus Himself didn't have a Burger King attitude. *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. John 6: 38*
 - (ii) Jesus understood that generals in an army don't do whatever they feel like. They do what is needed for the success of their team.
- (7) You can see now that our analogy with the orchestra is not perfect, because it is not that your career is at stake. It is that your entire life is at stake. The reason why you must put Jesus first in order to be able to be his disciple, is because discipleship to Jesus is not a question of some particular aspect of your life.

Instead, this is the overall question of your life. “How am I going to live my life? On what basis?”

- (a) Maybe the overall goal of your life is for it to be as comfortable and pleasurable as possible. A lot of people have that goal.
 - (b) But if your goal is to live the highest and best life that there is, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ and to carry out our own little part in God’s rescue plan for the world, we will need to follow His orders. And sometimes, we will need to sacrifice for the cause, as soldiers in times of conflict have to do. Are you willing to do that?
- (8) After you have died, if someone were to frankly ask the people who really knew you, say your spouse: “What was most important to your spouse in life?” What would they say? As Dallas Willard put it, what if they asked, “What did they really want?”
- (9) You see, there is something that is so often missed in these teachings of Jesus. As Dallas Willard pointed out, it’s not that Jesus taught “if you won’t put Me first, then I won’t let you be My disciple.” Instead, He taught, “if you won’t put Me first, then you **cannot** be My disciple.” As in, you simply will not be up task. Just like it will not be possible for you to actually perform with the Vienna Philharmonic unless you are willing to practice, attend rehearsals, and all the rest. You will never actually live the life God has for you, unless the fundamental reality of your life is a commitment to do what God would have you do.
- (a) Jesus was trying to give people the right idea from the get-go. No bait and switch here. You see, many people were coming at it totally the wrong way. They would tell Him things like, “well I want to follow you, but let me just take care of a few things first.” And Jesus just discouraged these folks outright from following Him, at least on those terms. In fact, Jesus described them as not *fit for service in the kingdom of God. Luke 9:62* Following Jesus is not something you do on the side. Or after your other more important things are taken care of. Following Him is central in your life. Your life is organized around it.
 - (b) Often, people who don’t follow any particular religion will say things like “I have been open minded in my journey, in my own way I looked for God, but I just never found Him.” Well, did you want to find Him more than you wanted anything else in the World? We will not find the life that Jesus lived and taught until we make that our top priority, is what Jesus was teaching in the plainest language possible.
 - (c) You see Jesus had to be crystal clear on this because things were getting out of hand at points. He was terribly exciting, enormously appealing for a lot of the down and out oppressed Jewish people smushed under Roman rule. And a lot of people seemed to have gotten the wrong idea about him. The same ideas that are popular about Him today. That He was a sort of Santa Clause with magical powers whose primary purpose was to help them get their own agendas completed. Fix their life up the way they wanted it to be. But Jesus

says, “no, it’s not your agenda. That’s the old life you have left. The new life you have started is about My agenda.” The way that a disciple runs their life will be for the purposes of God, under the direction and governance of God.

(i) Now there is major confusion on that point too. Following Jesus doesn’t mean that you can never do anything that you want or that God is going to dictate every aspect of your life. No. Your life will still be your life.

1. And so, if you take Jesus as your Master, you will still be running your life. You will still be creatively thinking things through. You will still choose where you live, marry someone you choose and that you like, love you family and friends, paint your walls the colors you like, pick a job that is a good fit for you, all of that.

2. What Jesus meant when He said that you have to hate your family to be His disciple is that if push comes to shove and it’s choosing between, say, what your siblings or your parents demand and expect, and what Jesus is asking you to do, then you have to go with what Jesus is asking you to do. There cannot be anything more important to you in your life than following Jesus.

(d) We need to feel the burn of these words of Jesus. Bishop Robert Barron asked Jordan Peterson several years back, “Why is the church not attractive to young people?” and Jordan Peterson responded, “because it demands so little of them.” In many ways we in the Church today have just gutted the radical call of Jesus entirely. But the reality is that a discipleship commitment to someone as counter-cultural as Jesus will be evident in all the areas of our life. We will act differently, speak differently, spend differently, then society at large. People will notice.

ii) We have now discussed the cost of discipleship, which is total. From one perspective, discipleship actually sounds like a tremendous sacrifice on our part. But is it?

(a) Well, consider that throughout time, some Christians have had their priorities put to the test. They have had to make very real and very difficult choices about just how important following Jesus was to them. But even in the most extreme cases, such as martyrdom, what Jesus taught was this:

(i) *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Matthew 13:44.* He sold **everything** that he had. But guess what...he did it with joy. Why? Because He was getting a treasure for it!

(ii) Paul says the same thing in Philippians (3:8)... *What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ*

(b) In the case of what Jesus is offering, and what must be given up to get it...we can see from these passages that discipleship is not a net loss for us. In fact, it

is not even like buying a car, where there is a fair exchange of sorts. Instead, it is more like giving up a penny and getting a brand-new house. You could not ask for a better deal. In fact, the possibility that Jesus holds out, the possibility of discipleship to Him, is the greatest opportunity in your life.

- (2) And what specifically is so great about discipleship that it far outweighs any difficulty or suffering we might possibly encounter in leaving our old life behind? What makes the pearl, a pearl of such great price?

(a) Here is the answer: *For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. Matthew 16.* Follow me! Jesus calls to us...Follow Him where? To what? Out through your paltry and confused life as it is now, to the death of that life, past it, and into your true life, your real self. What is Jesus offering? He offers you a radical transformation of all aspects of your person into something more beautiful, more full of virtue, joy, hope, and peace, and glorious than you can imagine. And He offers a spot for you on His team that is saving the World. Let's now explore that in detail.

- iii) In offering us discipleship, Jesus offers us a real solution to the central problems of human existence. The only real solution.

(1) In doing so, Jesus starts with a penetrating assessment of our situation. The central problem with individuals and with the world itself is not the media, technology, our educational systems, or our political systems. These are, in their own ways, deeply problematic. But actually, their brokenness is only a symptom of the underlying issue. The underlying issue is this: *A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of,* says Jesus *Luke 6:45.*

(a) Jesus saw that what we do is simply a reflection of who we are. "I can't believe I did that!" we sometimes say when we are particularly embarrassed or flustered by an action of ours. But that just means that we do not know our hearts, that they have surprised us. And our hearts do surprise us like that sometimes. Because it is hard for us to come to terms with who we are. Uncomfortable to look in there, deep in our hearts. But Jesus did. And He insisted that, *No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. Luke 6:43*

- iv) Jesus taught that the problem, in a nut shell, is that deep down we are corrupt and broken. Our bad behavior is merely a symptom of the disease within us, taught Jesus. Underneath all the coping and the fine shows we put on to others and to ourselves, often, when goodness gets really difficult and demanding and inconvenient for us, we don't even know what the right way forward is, want to take the right way forward, or have the constitution to walk that tough road.

- v) And telling someone like that to be good, to do what is right, giving them a rule, is useless. In fact, trying to be good will just make them miserable and frustrated.

(a) As an example, consider addiction, the disease of being dominated by desire. A lot of people are addicted to gambling, alcohol, electronics, pornography,

opioids, and all sorts of other things. Just telling them, “Don’t do that,” is not going to help them.

- vi) For addicts and the rest of us as well, the problem with having darkness in our hearts, is that what is inside of us, in one form or another, will always come bubbling up to the surface.
 - (1) You can try and suppress it. Keep your lid on tight. But doing that is like trying to duct tape a lid to a pot that is full of water with the burner on high. You are not going to keep that water in that pot. The lid will crack or explode or whatever.
 - (a) The real problems of human existence cannot be addressed by behavior management, or by self-discipline. By manipulation of things or circumstances external to ourselves.
 - (2) If we are half-rotten on the inside, then the best we can ever hope to be, as it has famously been put “a snow-covered dunghill.”
 - (a) Now, a person who is *a bad tree*, as Jesus put it, can, with effort, for a season, or for some particular reason, produce a decent piece of fruit or two. But it’s not natural for them. It’s not who they are. They will by default tend to do otherwise. It is sort of awful to watch them, straining and gritting their teeth and just paining themselves to do the right thing, even though deep down they really don’t want to. Miserable on the inside because of it, but trying, out of a sense of duty rather than delight, to do what must be done. In a sense its noble, straining against the difficulty how they are. Noble but futile. One step forward, one step backward. They may have outbursts or binging type behaviors. Prone to resentment and bitterness.
 - (b) Just the plain old debaucherous free-wheeling indulgent heathen types are less miserable. Or people who really don’t think much at all, about anything, and vaguely consider themselves to be a good person. But those types lives have many severe problems of their own. And most people therefore end up making some efforts to be good. And end up proportionally frustrated to their degree of effort.
 - (c) Frustration is the hallmark of someone trying to be good, who has not yet been made well inside. Are you frustrated? Despite your best efforts, tripping up and slipping time and time again? Frustrated with trying to love your spouse, or your kids, or your boss? Frustrated with them? With yourself?
 - (d) At the end of his life, Leonard Cohen, after a lifetime of battling against his own limitations and failures, looked deep within himself and penned these lyrics, “I’m angry and I’m tired all the time,” he sang.
- b) But thank God that, as CS Lewis pointed out in his chapter from Mere Christianity, “Nice people or new men,” Jesus didn’t come just to make us try and be nicer, while leaving us confused and miserable. Instead, he invites us to *take off the old self* and *be made new*, as *Ephesians (4:22-24)* puts it, from the inside out.
 - i) Jesus offers us a radically new way to be human. Here He is contrasting the old way and the new way:
 - (1) “*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Matthew 23:25-26*

- (2) Jesus offers to wash the inside of your cup. If there was a single idea to express all of the basis of Christian morality, it would be that...*the inside of the cup*. True righteousness is not defined by external works and acts, but by the kind of person one has become.
- (a) Clean the inside of the cup, says Jesus. Then you will not need to suppress and bottle things up. At that point, you can simply be who you are. Jesus, for instance, didn't need to try to wrestle with or suppress what was inside. He let it out. And wonderful things resulted.
 - (b) *The good tree produces the good fruit. Matthew 7:17.* If you are a good tree, good fruit will be an ordinary, expected, and consistent result of who you are, without any great effort involved.
 - (c) So, for example, it is not that I don't shout because I am an angry person who is an expert in suppressing myself, or who has rearranged my life to get rid of the challenging people that upset me. Instead, I don't shout because I am not, any longer, angry. Get rid of anger. Be free of it, offers Jesus. Fear, insecurity, pride, selfishness, greed, lust, resentment, compulsive behaviors. Cut it off at the source. All of it. *Who the Son sets free is free indeed. John 8:36.*
 - (i) So, when we talk about the cost of discipleship being our entire lives, we need to appreciate that the vast majority of what we are giving up in our old life to follow Jesus is garbage. The things that are in fact ruining your life. Making you bored, and lonely and, anxious, and fearful.
 - 1. We just gave an example of some garbage you would have to give up to follow Christ: being angry. Anyway, how is being chronically angry? Is it fun? Pleasant? What kind of mood is that person in? Is it good for your blood pressure?
 - 2. Take another example, lust. Is lusting and pining after someone you do not have rewarding and fulfilling? On the contrary, Cormac McCarthy pointed out that lust is something close to anguish.
 - (ii) Dallas Willard remarked that someone has written a book entitled "The cost of discipleship." And that's ok. But that is only half the story. The other half is the cost of non-discipleship.
 - 1. You see, in the heat of the moment, sin is at times the easy way. *Hebrews (11:25)* talks about *the fleeting pleasures of sin*. But in the long run, the sinful life is a difficult and unpleasant road.
 - a. Discipleship to Christ, on the other hand, can be hard going at first. But if you stick with it, and you learn from Jesus how to be like Him, you will find the sustained reality of the easy yolk, and the light burden.
 - ii) You will find yourself undergoing deep inner transformation in several domains. After all, humans who are trying to be good and do what is right are in a complicated, three-fold dilemma.
 - (1) Here it is:
 - (a) Often, we think we do, but we really don't know what is good for us or those around us, as we are easily mistaken and deceived.

- (b) And even when we know what we ought to do, we often do not deep down, really want to do it.
- (c) And even when we know what we need to do and want to do it, we often are simply unable to do it.
- (2) But as you persist in the way of Christ all three of these issues will be dealt with.
 - (a) As far as coming to know what is good, we discussed this in our talk on the spiritual discipline of study.
 - (b) That leaves the other two. The being willing and the being able. Let's discuss those two. What would it look if the inside of our cup was washed, and we really were both willing and able to do what is good?
- iii) Let's start with our being willing to do what is good.
 - (1) Dallas Willard said, "God's intent for us is that we would become the kind of persons that He can empower to do what we want." I didn't misspeak there. "God's intent for us is that we would become the kind of persons that He can empower to do what we want to do." Now, the only way that God can do that for us, is if our wanter has been transformed. A vital part of our spiritual revolution is that we become the kind of person who is not even interested in doing evil, who finds it detestable, or boring.
 - (a) As an example, a friend confessed to me that he could not stop habitually falling to the temptation of viewing pornography. And you know what I told him, "Try harder!" No, I didn't tell him that. That is like telling the basketball novice to just get out there and win in an NBA game. Instead, I told him "Try different!" I pointed him to the triangle of transformation. I told him to use all that trying you are doing to try and become the kind of person who doesn't even want to watch pornography. Then, it won't be so hard to control yourself on the computer, will it?
 - (i) By the way, that's a good indication of whether or not a person is righteous. For the righteous person, what they ought to do is the same as what they want to do.
 - (ii) In fact, as you come into righteousness, many times, doing a wrong thing simply will not occur to you in the first place. And when it does...not so appealing.
 - (iii) As the inside of the cup is washed, we find that deepest feelings change. As you mature in Christ, you might just find yourself starting to care deeply about that person you have been stuck next to and griping about year after year. The hard feelings just aren't there anymore. And it's not hard to be kind to someone you deeply love and care for.
 - (b) That is when the yoke becomes easy, and the burden becomes light.
 - (i) That deep inner change is what God is after. For instance, *God loves a cheerful giver*, says 2 Corinthians (9:7). Why a cheerful giver? Because a miserable giver hasn't had their wanter changed. *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion*, is how that passage continues on. God is not about control, compulsion,

manipulation. He is trying to help you find that easy yoke of freedom and spontaneity that Christ knew and lived.

- (ii) But what about wanting to do right when the going gets tough? Let's take an extremely difficult example. Christ on the cross. Specifically, think about His forgiving people as they physically tortured him. How do you think He felt in that situation? What did He want to do? Was that easy for Him to be kind to them? Or was it hard?
 - 1. It was easier for Him to forgive, than it would have been for Him to get angry and hateful with them.
 - a. Now, sometimes, things that He had to do were difficult for Him. Take the garden of Gethsemane. Sometimes, both choices were difficult.
 - b. But in Jesus's case, the right choice was always easier, more natural, than the wrong choice. It was what He really wanted.
 - c. And that is the possibility for us as well. To become that kind of person.
- c) We talked about our becoming willing to do what is good, now how about our becoming able to do what is good?
 - i) Consider a professional basketball player. They are not just willing to be great at basketball. They are also able to be. Now, why is that? How did they get to the place where they were able to be great at basketball?
 - (1) They practiced. And they have now come to a position where they are able to be great at basketball.
 - (a) They are not throwing up airballs, or dribbling it off their shoe. They have learned how not to do those things. Likewise, they are not stressing and trying to memorize plays on the sideline, or doing last minute conditioning exercises to get it shape. Already done. As a result, it's simply effortless and fluid looking, the way they play. They are having a good time out there, a lot of the time. It's the easy yoke, isn't it?
 - ii) But the key to their on-court success was the practice that they did ahead of time. Similarly, unless we have already developed the character of Jesus ahead of time, when we are confronted with a difficult situation, we often simply will not be able to do what we need to do.
 - (1) That is why the apostle Paul in that passage we went through earlier (*1 Corinthians 9:24–27*) uses the metaphor of athletic training for his efforts in self-discipline. The spiritual practices are like practicing your free throws. By doing the free throw training, you become the kind of person who can shoot that shot well in an actual game. The spiritual practices bridge the gap between our wanting to be able to do good, and our actually being able to do good.
 - (2) These elements that compose the lifestyle we have committed to are in some Christian traditions called practices and in some Christian traditions called disciplines. But I prefer to call them practices. I think we are better to call them practices because in doing the practices we are practicing. Practicing saying no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit. Getting good at it.

- (3) And we need to practice it because we are not naturally good at it. Walking by the flesh is what we are used to. As N.T. Wright points out, vice is automatic, it is default. Virtue is learned, it is practiced. If we are going to rewire our habits from bad to good, at first, it is very tough going. You are battling your most fundamental inclinations. But over time, your basic inclinations will change.
- (4) With practice and repetition, both walking in the Spirit, and also the practices themselves become easier over time. In fact, they eventually become habits. Eventually it will become unconscious, just the way you do things. And that is critical because in order to be effective in our everyday lives, righteousness must simply become a habit for us. After all, humans are creatures of habit. Ruled by habit. When dealing with difficult family or work circumstances, for instance, we sometimes don't have time to stop the whole situation and get ready to deal with it. A response is required in short order. Or sometimes anger or envy or other harmful things will just start bubbling up in us before we are even aware that they are. All the hormones lighting you up and your blood pressure getting elevated before you can do anything about it. That is why holiness needs to be our automatic, default mode. Envy, despair, greed? You simply have fallen out of the habit.
- (5) If you are persistent in all three sides of the triangle of transformation, you will not continue on as a big bundle of failure forever. Instead, real spiritual progress can and will be made.
 - (a) Once you have the knowledge that you need from having done your study, you will have been set free by the truth. The lies won't hang you up anymore. You won't keep dribbling off your shoe like that. Once you have the discipline that you need from having done your practices, the fellowship of the community of the saints holding you up because you have invested in that, the learned ability of finding your satisfaction in God, experience walking in the Spirit, and all these other things wonderful at work, you will become able as well as willing. You will have learned how.
- iii) And in terms of our becoming not just willing but also able to do what is good, remember that the key to this is that our efforts in Christlikeness are always met by God's efforts. And so, as our life in Christ progresses, more and more the activity of God Himself will be working in and through us. That is why the Dallas Willard quote that we have been exploring says, "God's intent for us is that we would become the kind of persons that he can **empower** to do what we want."
- (1) Consider the case of Jesus. It is not simply that doing good is what Jesus willed and wanted, and so He did it. It was beyond that. Read the gospels carefully, and you will notice that from the moment of His conception, to the moment of His resurrection and beyond, the Spirit was super-charging His life. For instance, after Jesus is tempted, He returns to Galilee, begins his public ministry, and how is this described? He returned *in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4: 14)*. Jesus didn't do things all on his own, did He? He didn't live according to the flesh. He lived according to the Spirit. He always cooperated with the Spirit. And

therefore, He constantly had something of real substance coming to Him, something from another World. God's power is what Jesus lived by, producing the wonderful results He did in the World. Christ could do the incredible things that He did like graciously forgiving his torturers because He was dialed into the infinite resources of God Himself. Think about this:

(a) *And the people all tried to touch Jesus, because **power was coming from him** and healing them all. Luke 6:19*

(2) What were Jesus's students supposed to learn from Him? You could be a disciple of a steelworker. And then you would be an apprentice training in how to work steel. If you are a disciple of Jesus, what are you training to do? Well, logically speaking, the answer would be that you are training to do what Jesus did. But what did Jesus do? What was Jesus actually doing on planet earth? He was living by the power of God, and acting on God's behalf in the world.

(a) What did Jesus instruct His students to seek as their first priority? What is the most important thing in life for us to obtain? *Seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness...Matthew 6:33.* Dallas Willard is very helpful on this passage. We are to seek first:

1. The Kingdom of God – which has to do with the power of God.

2. And God's righteousness – which has to do with the character of God.

(ii) Above all, we are to seek to grow in the character and power of God in our own lives.

(iii) And by the way, God only gives them as a package deal. The righteousness and the power always come to us together.

1. This is because if God gave you power and you didn't have the character, it would not be safe for you, or for others

a. For instance, when you got really mad at your neighbor, you might just make that tree that is looking so danglely there to temptingly fall right on their roof! But Jesus didn't do that kind of thing with His power. He could be trusted with it. And so He was.

(b) The holiness and power of God was what Paul lived by as well. *[Christ] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone **fully mature in Christ.** To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. Colossians 1:28-29.*

(3) And for us today, to learn the way of Christ is to come to live by that same power. What did Paul understand the gospel to be? *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the **power** of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Romans 1:16.*

(a) Someone once said, "Socrates showed us how to die with dignity but Christ showed us how to die with hope." Jesus died with hope because He knew God's power. That it was without limit. He knew that death was a small thing, in light of that power. *I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead. Ephesians 1:19.*

- (4) That same mighty power, working in you...imagine that. You might not have the same role as Jesus. You might not go around inaugurating the fulfilment of the kingdom of God on Earth, healing people, or appointing apostles, or walking on water. But understand that God is a real person. That He is acting in this World. And that one way He is acting is in the form of power being sent from Him to His children. This is what Jesus lived, believed and taught. This is what Jesus came to announce and to facilitate for each and every human being. The wonder of our direct interaction with God Himself.
- (5) That is what it looks like to be willing and able to do what is good. There is no other way to get there.
- d) So, is Christianity hard or easy? A life of participation with God is the good life, the full life, the healthy life, the content life. Where all those wonderful manifestations of His Spirit's activity: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22)* are a description of our inner life. Those beautiful things have become our state of mind and the way that we genuinely feel about life. And so, goodness and kindness and all of that just tend more often than not to flow out the insides of our cups.
- i) Character formation is the work of a lifetime. But as we progress in our discipleship to Jesus, we slowly but surely move out of the arena of struggling and frustration and into the arena of freedom, spontaneity, and rest.
- (1) Trying to live the life we ought to live all on our own is like pushing a car along by hand. Living the life we ought to live in the power of God is like cruising down the road while opening the engine up, all cylinders firing.
- (2) Here is C.S. Lewis: "I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at first to be all about morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on, out of all that, into something beyond. One has a glimpse of a country where they do not talk of those things, except perhaps as a joke. Everyone there is filled full with what we should call goodness as a mirror is filled with light. But they do not call it goodness. They do not call it anything. They are not thinking of it. They are too busy looking at the source from which it comes. But this is near the stage where the road passes over the rim of our world."
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
- (3) Our sorry world desperately needs people like that. People full of wisdom and love, who have put their own selfish Burger King agendas by the wayside, as are acting as powerful and effective agents of God's beautiful work of restoration and healing in the world.
- (a) *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10*
- (b) Do you care about this world and the people in it? Then become a disciple of Christ. The other systems of thought, other religious teachers and philosophers, at times, have very good and helpful things to say. But they can never be wholly adequate to the problems facing humanity. Because only

Jesus accessed the power of God. Only Jesus manifested it, and gave it to His followers. Only He can show you how to live by it. *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6* Will you live as a disciple of Christ? So much depends on it. As Dallas Willard observed, discipleship or non-discipleship is a choice that each of us makes each day. How am I going to choose to live today?

- 6) Lets summarize this talk.
 - a) We discussed that the most important project of Jesus's life, and His command to His followers, was to make disciples. A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning from Him how to lead their life as He would lead their life if He were they. Discipleship will never happen without our making a practical and comprehensive life plan to follow Jesus, and restructuring our lives accordingly.
 - b) Discipleship to Jesus must be the most important thing in your life if you are going to be successful in it. Discipleship leads us out of the old life of bondage and frustration, and into a new life where we know what is good, and we are willing and able to do it. As the inside of our cup gets washed, goodness more and more simply becomes a natural and spontaneous expression of our inner selves.
 - c) We also discussed that we come into contact with the power of God as we progress in discipleship to Christ. And that this profoundly transforms ourselves and the World around us.

Father, we commit our lives to you, entirely.

Amen

Reflection

- What is the main reason people hesitate to become disciples of Christ?
- Why is a requirement for discipleship to Christ that it must be the most important thing in your life?
- What is frustration the hallmark of?
- What does the state of our "wanter" reveal about the inside of our cup?