

The Christian Life Works Best When We Follow God's Instructions

The operating instructions, for how to live for Christ in any culture, any country, and any time period in history: is given by God in His Word. The Owner's Manual that shows how to assemble, operate, repair, maintain, and best utilize our grace enabled spiritual life, is the Bible.

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Peter told us near the end of his life that all things needed for living for Christ in this world are in God's Word. Peter said that all things that *pertain to life* (that means how to operate in every day life in a dark and warped world); and that *pertain to godliness* (that means how to please God by growing conformity to His plan for us) have been given in the Bible. (2 Peter 1:3-4).

“As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (NKJV).”

The essence of the life of a believer in the New Testament was how to live out Christ in the world, by being anchored to His Word, in the context of the church, the Body of Christ, the fellowship of others also in Christ.

Isolation From Nurturing Relationships is Bad

The norm for the New Testament believer is not isolation it is community.

The danger of anonymity and isolation is that it effectively insulates a believer from other Spirit-filled believers.

God's Word warns us about the deadening results of the absence of other Spirit-filled believers exhorting, admonishing, and encouraging my life. That is the context of the Hebrews 10:22-25 passage. Look there with me:

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (NKJV).”

Discipleship is Personal, Long-term Change Counseling

God is asking each of us to live in such a way that our life can become a pattern of His grace that can be used to mentor, encourage, coach, tutor, teach, train and guide another's life towards Him.

There is nothing greater in life than to be useful for God!

Christ's church was born into a sin-warped, sin-darkened world of mixed-up marriages, sin-scarred lives, and confused families.

But men and women who were gloriously saved did not automatically become great wives and mothers, or husbands and fathers. When they came to Christ and were forgiven, God graciously gave them everything they needed to become godly wives, mothers, husbands, and fathers. But, they needed something else.

These new believers needed coaching, training, modeling, and encouraging in a one-on-one relationship. Godly behavior is a series of choices; and those men and women had to be nurtured in daily skills that would lead to loving marriages and families.

Christ's method for the training of these new converts was two-fold. They gathered for a group session as an entire church body. The Scriptures were faithfully taught, and they were fed healthy doctrine for spiritual growth. That group teaching of the gathered church was vitally performed by the called and gifted pastors of Christ's church; but side-by-side with that didactic teaching of God's Word that fed Christ's flock weekly, was another equally vital ministry which we find captured for us in the New Testament

Discipleship & Counseling means Mentoring Believers in Truth

This month is the start of transitioning from principles of counseling to the Discipleship & Counseling format that we'll see for most of the rest of the class. The key to all spiritual growth is our co-operation with the mortification side of sanctification. Like Roundup applied to weeds is the Spirit of God applied to our "besetting sins". Any that we allow the Spirit of God to mortify become mortally wounded and never again have the same hold on us as they had.

What are some of the weeds that can blow into the yards of our life and start growing; and all spiritual weeds need Spiritual Round Up applied to them regularly?

This week's lesson starting on page 70 begins a list of the eight most common forms of besetting sins. Most of us will be surprised by this list. In modern American culture these are spoken of as virtues, whereas God calls them vices that eat at our soul, and sap us of genuine spiritual life and power.

Join me on p. 70 and listen to Psalm 115:1:

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth (NKJV)”.

Pleasing God Means Resisting Human Philosophies

This verse is the heart's cry of the follower after Jesus Christ. We want to praise to come to us, we want God to be all in all, we want Him to increase and us to decrease. Turn to BCF, the bottom of p. 70, and p. 71. Here are the eight lies of the world that can spring up in the minds of a believer and cause the weeds of Satan's lies to cloud our spiritual thinking:

1. ***The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-worth"***. Because we were born sinners we only deserve death. Our true self-worth is actually negative; it is actually a debt. We are debtors to God because of our sin from birth onward. We do not deserve, merit, or have a right to God's favor or attention. It is only His grace that shined in our hearts (Eph. 2:8-9).
2. ***The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-assurance"***. Only the Lord gives anything that is good or perfect, and it is a gift from above (James 1). A gift means unearned, unmerited, and undeserved. What assures us is the character of the Giver, His mercy, love, grace, and kindness. We seek as we follow Him, to be more and more dependent upon Him, rather than upon ourselves, our possessions and abilities.

- 3. *The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-love".***
- 4. *The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-assertiveness".***
- 5. *The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-confidence".***
- 6. *The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-esteem".***
- 7. *The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-righteousness".***
- 8. *The error of trusting in the world's definition of "self-exaltation".***

Following Jesus is the call of every believer. As the Apostle John was inspired to say, it is also the test of true salvation. Listen to him in his first letter: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." (1 John 2:6)

Discipleship is Learning to Follow Jesus

Although the word discipleship is a common term used constantly in many churches, we don't seem to see Christ-like people developing as readily as it is talked about? We live in a land where millions of born again Christians are suffering from acute biblical illiteracy; and many of them are enslaved to culture-accommodating lifestyles. It is a critical time to reassess how God's Word says to train people to be true followers of our Lord Jesus.

“Perhaps the greatest single weakness of the contemporary Christian Church is that millions of supposed members are not really involved at all and, what is worse, do not think it strange that they are not.

As soon as we recognize Christ's intention to make His Church a militant company we understand at once that the conventional arrangement cannot suffice. There is no real chance of victory in a campaign if ninety per cent of the soldiers are untrained and uninvolved, but that is exactly where we stand now.”¹

¹ Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, NY, NY: Harper, 1961, p. 38.

In analyzing the Gospels we find that Jesus ministered to the multitudes no less than 17 times; but His small group sessions recorded number no less than 46.

Although this is just an observation, we could conclude that Christ's plan was to offer a mix of 25% public training (large group sessions) and 75% small group nurturing (discipleship, hands on demonstrations and accountability). John Wesley wrote:

“I am more and more convinced that the devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half-awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again.”²

² John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, entry dated Sunday March 13, 1743; vol. 1 (10.14.1735 to 11.17.1746), London: J. Kenshaw, 1827, p. 398.

So, in 1743 John Wesley organized a society.

“Such a society is no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their own salvation.”³

The rest is history. From Wesley’s ministry the Methodist Church began and spread across the world in evangelism and missionary work. The results were astounding. England’s culture was shaken to the core. Churches grew everywhere, and British missions spanned the globe. But as with most other great movements, these types of ministries in Britain have all but stopped.

³ Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, article entitled “Methodists”, Waugh & Mason, Ny, NY: 1832, p. 641.

What has happened to the church of the 21st century?

Christians that were baptized into the hope of both eternal life and newness of life are often not successful in living Christ out in practical, every day ways.

This most likely because the Biblical concept of “teaching” is becoming more of a “telling” or “pointing” to available resources, rather than the prescribed, life-style demonstration that God had Paul initiate for all of the churches in the immensely vital Titus 2:1-7 passage. This lack of discipleship was also warned about in Hebrews.

“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 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! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Heb. 5:11-14)

The sad truth is that:

No Discipleship Produces Spiritual Immaturity

What are the common signs of the un-discipled believer? They are often along these lines:

1. Marginal desire for God's Word (virtually “Biblically illiterate”).
2. Walks in the flesh; does not know the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.
3. Few “works of faith”, i.e., no evidence of being filled with God’s love to serve others, giving, etc.
4. Easily swayed or deceived by false doctrines.
5. Stuck in the basics, experiencing no growth.
6. Limited desire for fellowship with other believers.
7. Strong desire for worldly possessions, and showing selfish ambitions and a spirit of competition.

8. Difficulty in repenting/forgiving others.
9. Lacking compassion for the lost.
10. Not actively assisting in the spiritual development of others.
11. Limited sense of God, His character or His will.
12. Life filled with fear, anxiety, and the absence of peace.
13. Often covetous, boastful, prideful, manipulative, etc.
14. Ongoing financial difficulties (living far beyond means...in debt).
15. Seekers of pleasure.
16. Lives marked by lack of discipline (physically, mentally, and spiritually).
17. Only partial victory over sin.
18. Non-existent or lackluster prayer life.
19. Little or no time or sincere interest in true worship.
20. Not accountable to anyone for anything. ⁴

⁴ Doug Morrell, Wesley's 3-Strand Discipleship, May 18, 2005; <http://www.corediscipleship.org/index.html>

Christ's first words, to His first disciples, should be our first priority as His disciples today. "Follow Me" is still the essence of Biblical Christianity.

Which leads us to our final element in tonight's lesson:

Resisting the Wrongs Ways to See Change in People

BCF p. 74: BASIC APPROACHES TO SOLVE PERSONAL PROBLEMS (Isaiah 55:7-9)

	MAN'S WAY (Proverbs 14:12; 1 Corinthians 3:19-20; Colossians 2:8)				GOD'S WAY (John 10:9-10; Romans 11:33-36)
	Instinctual	Behavioral	Positive Potential	Spiritist	Heart Transformation (Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26; Acts 15:6-9)
BASIC VIEW OF MAN	Driven by instincts (i.e. instinctively does things: fight, flight, seek food and gratification)	Behavior is conditioned or "programmed"	Intrinsically good – has everything necessary within self to solve own problems	Helpless before all sprits	Sinner – Saint (Romans 5:12, 19; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, 21)
CAUSE OF PROBLEMS	Instincts are thwarted by society, family, and upbringing	Wrongly influenced by environment and circumstances	Mind blocked by negative thinking or influences	Committed to or under control of spirits, demons, ancestors	Rebellion (Romans 1:20-21) Unbelief (John 3:16-18, 5:38-40) Disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-2, 5:6; Titus 3:3) Denial of God's power (Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8)
CURE	Follow Instincts	Recondition or "reprogram"	Release potential within self	Appease ancestors; Appease or cast out demons, sprits; Discover your spirit guide	Be saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), and in loving obedience to God (Romans 6:16-19) be matured in Christ (Ephesians 4:13) through the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 5:18)
COUNSELING TECHNIQUE	Psychoanalysis (interpretation of irrational thoughts, analysis of dreams); Hypnosis therapy; Psychodrama; Re-socialization; Personality testing and analysis	Manipulation of behavior by use of positive and negative stimuli; Train to respond to reward and punishment	Reflection of thoughts and feelings; No presentation of answers – draw answer out of counselee's own inner resources; Positive thinking	Potions, charms, amulets, fetishes; Curses on enemy; Curse nullification; Ritual offerings; Communion with spirits; Mantras, chants; Horoscopes; "Visualization"	Listen (Proverbs 18:2, 13, 17); Reprove, rebuke, exhort (2 Timothy 4:2); Encourage (Hebrews 3:13); Admonish (Romans 15:14; Colossians 1:28); Stimulate (Hebrews 10:24); Strengthen (Hebrews 12:12); Restore (Galatians 6:1-2, 5); Teach (Romans 6:17-18; Colossians 3:16); Train (2 Timothy 2:2)
COUNSELOR'S THEOLOGY	Ego, Id, Drives, Libido, Conscious and Subconscious, Neurosis/Psychosis, Phobia, Mania, Catharsis, Self-Actualization, Free Association	Stimulus, Conditioning, Automatic response, Positive/negative reinforcement, Self-fulfillment, Self-improvement	Inner potential, Inherent goodness, Self-assertion, Self-esteem, Self-worth	Curses; god within; Higher power; Appeasal of spirits; Binding of demons; Generational sins; Demons or spirits of anger, fear. Lust, etc.	Sin (Romans 3:23) Put off practices of the old self and put on practices of the new self (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:5-17); Self-denial (Luke 9:23-25); Judge self (Matthew 7:1-5); Godliness (1 Timothy 4:7-8); Do the Word (James 1:22-25)
COUNSELING FOCUS	Liberate self (contrary to Ezekiel 18:20-21; Philippians 2:3-4)	Improve self (contrary to John 15:4-5; Romans 1:18-32; James 4:10)	Elevate self (contrary to Psalm 62:9; Romans 3:10-18, 23, 7:18)	Release self from bondage (contrary to John 15:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 5:4-5)	Deny self (Luke 9:23-23); Please God (2 Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 1:10) and bless others (1 Peter 3:8-9) through ministry (1 Peter 4:10) and service (Matthew 20:25-28)