

Face2Face Discipleship:

Seven Habits of Highly Useful Believers

Matthew 28:18-20

Each day we live we have a choice to refocus our lives on what matters to God. We know what matters to God, because Jesus Christ came to reveal the truth of God to us. Then Jesus asked His disciples to go and teach those truths to every new believer. Isn't that amazing? That's because:

## DISCIPLESHIP IS BIBLICAL

Today as we look at our Great Commission call to "go and make disciples" (Mt. 28:18-20), we are using the very same textbook, the actual original syllabus, and the very same materials Christ's Church has always had, and has always used: *God's Word, the Bible*.

**We have God's Word:** *the amazingly clear plan* God left.

**We have God's Word:** *the only guidebook* packed with Divine power.

**We have God's Word:** *the perfect resource* that has been tested throughout the world, in every generation: and has always worked perfectly.

Yet with that discipleship plan written out and ready to go, it seems that many are not focused on using it. In fact, to some, *their life as a believer becomes a bewildering & confusing search for something else*: the newest, the latest, the most popular spiritual idea, book, or program.

Often it seems like everyone is chasing after a different plan, or a new program.

Some Christians are actually exhausted trying to keep up with each new emphasis, or reading each new popular book, going to seminars, conferences, and staying online in case they missed something "new".

But that is not what Jesus left us to do. We were not left to chase the newest Christian idea trending through Twitter, posted online, and shared on Facebook.

Instead, *each new generation is called to examine the Scriptures*, learn how to personally follow what Jesus taught, and live in such a way that we can show others how we are following Him. So:

## DISCIPLESHIP IS BASIC

For the past several weeks we have been looking at the elements, that Christ said need to be communicated in person or as I like to call it: face2face.

We *can grow* as Christ's disciples all alone, just reading our Bible, spending time praying, and learning how to obey the Lord; but *we grow best* when we are discipled in person by others, in small groups, through the community of life together in the Body of Christ.

If we were to sift down both the Scriptures, and the many books written about discipleship, or nurturing, or mentoring: *we would find some very basic elements that are in both the Scriptures and in many books.*

Though some of the names and terms may differ, there are a handful of elements, or disciplines, or habits that are to be trained into the lives of each new believer. Here would be the results of my sifting through my dozens of books on Discipleship, as well as the Gospels, Acts & the Epistles. Here is the big picture, or summary of those seven common elements.

## FACE2FACE DISCIPLESHIP: SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY USEFUL BELIEVERS

These elements are blended, connected, and displayed from the pages of Scripture in the lives of those who followed and served the Lord.

1. **(Saved) Understanding Salvation:** Jesus came to save (Mt. 1:21). So, knowing what salvation is, assured that the work of grace has begun, and knowing how to share that faith is foundational.
2. **(Word-Fed) Seeking Nourishment from the Scriptures:** Some of Christ's first words are about the "daily bread" we need from God's Word (Mt. 4:4); and because all our minds are being fed something, we all should be asked: "What is feeding yours?"
3. **(Watchful) Expecting Spiritual Warfare:** Jesus went right from Baptism to the Wilderness of Temptation (Mt. 3:16-4:10); and so do most believers. The only difference is that He was prepared.
4. **(Connected) Living in Connection to God:** Christ's teaching on the necessity and His example of personal prayer habits is a strong reminder (Mt. 6:9-13). Our prayer life always reflects how much we need, trust, and love our Lord.
5. **(Spirit-Filled) Seeking Spirit-Filled Living:** When Jesus described salvation it included an overflowing river of the Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39); because we can only be useful to God when we allow Him to overflow our lives.
6. **(Invested) Understanding Life as a Stewardship:** Christ's parables so often pointed at an accounting, or stewardship of our lives (Mt. 25:21,23). We all need to soberly remember that we are each given a lifetime that can be invested or not invested, for the Lord.

7. **(Consecrated) Cultivating Spirit-Surrendered & Consecrated Living:** Paul capped his monumental doctrinal letter with a plea for regular, ongoing choices of surrender (Rom. 12:1-2): because we must keep presenting our bodies and seeking the renewing of our minds.

## DISCIPLESHIP PRODUCES HIGHLY USEFUL BELIEVERS

I like to say that the lives of highly useful believers that are portrayed in the Scriptures, are marked by ongoing right choices, which can be cultivated into spiritual habits.

There are at least 7 of these habits that mark the lives of those who are highly effective for God. These are the foundational truths of Christ's ministry and are reflected throughout the Book of Acts & the Epistles.

These are the truths that sharpen us as believers, that focus our lives on what matters to God, and what opens our lives to His power and blessings. Please open with me to Matthew 1 and see the basic plan of discipleship that Jesus left for us in His Word. Here they are:

**Habit-1: Believers need to be trained in Understanding Salvation:** Jesus came to save (Mt. 1:21). Jesus came to reveal God with us as Emmanuel (Mt. 1:23). So, knowing what salvation is, assured that the work of grace has begun, and knowing how to share that faith is foundational.

Matthew 1:21-23 (NKJV) And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

**Habit-2: Believers need to be trained in Seeking Nourishment from the Scriptures:** Some of Christ's first words are about the "daily bread" we need from God's Word (Mt. 4:4); and because all our minds are being fed something, we all should be asked: "What is feeding yours?"

**Habit-3: Believers need to be trained in Expecting Spiritual Warfare:** Jesus went right from Baptism to the Wilderness of Temptation (Mt. 3:16-4:10); and so do most believers. The only difference is that He was prepared. Jesus told us the way to survive is to "watch & pray" (Mt. 25:13; 26:41). We must learn to resist Satan's neutralizing attempts at our desires to be: Serving in Christ's Church, Soul-winning as a lifestyle, maintaining Simplicity prompted usefulness & and experiencing the power of Scriptural Meditation.

Habit-4: Believers need to be trained in **Living in Connection to God:** Christ's teaching on the necessity and His example of personal prayer habits is a strong reminder (Mt. 6:9-13). Our prayer life always reflects how much we need, trust, and love our Lord.

Habit-5: Believers need to be trained in **Understanding the Stewardship of Life:** Christ's parables so often pointed at an accounting, or stewardship of our lives (Mt. 25:21,23). We all need to soberly remember that we are each given a lifetime that can be invested or not invested, for the Lord.

Habit-6: Believers need to be trained in **Seeking Spirit-Filled Living:** When Jesus described salvation it included an overflowing river of the Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39), because we can only be useful to God when we allow Him to overflow our lives.

Habit-7: Believers need to be trained in **Maintaining a Surrendered Life:** Paul capped his monumental doctrinal letter with a plea for regular, ongoing choices of surrender (Rom. 12:1-2): because we must keep presenting our bodies and seeking the renewing of our minds.

## FACE2FACE DISCIPLESHIP: SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY USEFUL BELIEVERS

So that is the summary of the plan Christ left for each of us to live and then to share. Each of these habits are elements of the new life Christ offered through salvation.

So far we have seen the first four elements: saved, Word-Fed, Spirit-Filled, and Consecrated.

### 1. SAVED: UNDERSTANDING THE SALVATION JESUS CAME TO GIVE

In John 7:37, first Jesus describes salvation when He said: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." That is salvation. That is coming to Him in faith and being supernaturally saved. Then Jesus described the result of salvation in verse 38: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Did you hear how Jesus described the normal life of the believer? God planned that the life of a born again person become like a flowing river of life. Not anything like a little trickle—He said Rivers of water. What does that mean?

**When God's Spirit flows out of our lives we are so excited about all our sins being gone.** In fact when we are involved with communion, it is such a time of remembering of what Jesus did.

The joyous streams of the Holy Spirit cause us to be so thankful that we are forgiven. Next we are:

## 2. WORD-FED: UNDERSTANDING WE NEED NOURISHMENT FROM GOD

**When God's Spirit flows out of our lives, the Bible seems just like having God talking to us.** When we are full of Him as you read this Book and start over again, perhaps in the New Year, it's just like having God talk to us. That's what it's like Jesus said- when out of us flow rivers of living water.

Some of Christ's first words are about the "daily bread" we need from God's Word (Mt. 4:4); and because all our minds are being fed something, we all should be asked: "What is feeding yours?"

## 3. SPIRIT-FILLED: UNDERSTANDING CHRIST LIVING THROUGH US

In fact, one word tells all there is about walking in the Spirit today. Please turn with me to Ephesians 5:18-19, and as we read, may we find the secret they knew and followed and like them, do the same!

Ephesians 5:18-19 (NKJV) And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but **be filled with the Spirit**, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

That is God's plan. That is why this may be one of the single most vital lessons in personal discipleship. Because, more than anything else, the Spirit of God can totally alter the way you live. God's Spirit can change us into brand new people!

The Scriptures show us that a truly spiritual person will be growing in visible ways, in each of these areas that are described in v. 22-23. Staying filled with the Spirit is visible; and it shows up in the:

## THE NINE LIFE-ALTERING CHANGES THE SPIRIT OF GOD BRINGS

**Love** is the absence of selfishness. It is the product of the Holy Spirit present in our lives (Rom. 5:5). The whole law is fulfilled: by loving God and our neighbor, Jesus said. Love involves personal sacrifice for another.

### **Personal checkup questions:**

Do I sacrifice my way so I can follow God's way?

Do I sacrificially deny myself so God gets His way?

Can others trace my progress in expressing God's love?

Do those who watch me see me as less selfish and self-seeking than I was last month, or last year?

**Joy** is the spiritual quality that releases us from circumstances; because love and self-centeredness cannot co-exist. However, the Apostle Paul said that he was II Cor. 6:10 - sorrowful yet always full of joy.

**Personal checkup question:**

Do those that know me and watch my life see evidences throughout my daily life at work, school, and home as a more and more joyful person?

**Peace** is the internal serenity that only God can give. Troubles are not absent. Rather, God is present! God promised to keep us in peace, if we will just cling to Him (Isaiah 26:3).

**Personal checkup questions:**

Has peace through changes, upsets, unexpected twists, struggles, challenges, trials, and pains become more and more a way of life for me this year?

Do people notice your growing peacefulness?

**Longsuffering/Patience** is the absence of personal irritation at the actions of others. It is that bearing long with people that Paul spoke of in I Corinthians. Patience is also one of the Supreme attributes of God. It is His character that is revealed as being gracious and longsuffering. See Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; II Peter 3:9.

**Personal checkup questions:**

Ask yourself, am I more patient than I was three months ago, or less?

Does patience characterize the way others would describe my: driving, explaining constant questions, directing how things need to be done, and interacting with people in general?

Are you patient? If we are not increasing in patience, it is only an evidence that we are not yielding and submitting to the Holy Spirit.

**Kindness** is a beautiful reflection of God in our lives, by the absence of an abrasive manner in my dealings with people. It is a chosen reflection of Ephesians 2:8 and 4:32 in my life. "Kindness is seen as that sensitivity toward others that issues into deeds of self sacrifice and love even toward the unlovely and undeserving ones". Kindness will soften any word or act that might hurt another.

**Personal checkup questions:**

Is God changing my way of looking at people and responding towards people?

Would someone following me around for a day say that my actions are showing an increasing tendency toward personal kindness with others?

**Goodness** is being Godlike! It is the opposite of fallen humanity. Look at how Jesus is described in Acts 10:38, when the Holy Spirit anointed His life: He simply went about doing good.

**Personal checkup questions:**

Am I a visibly better person than last year to those that feel my life up close?

Do people see me doing good, to all those around me?

Do people think of the presence God when they see how I act, or do they think of the absence of God?

**Faithfulness** is God producing in us a trustworthy and dependable life. Surrendering our schedules to God makes us the kind of person that keeps their own life in order so that you can count on them. Like Psalm 15 speaks of, they make and keep their word.

**Personal checkup questions:**

Am I making strides in reliability and dependability?

Is my life less and less out of control, and more and more under God's control?

Am I faithful in punctuality, finances, promises, and my spiritual disciplines like prayer & the Word? Any part of my life that is out of control is reminding me that area is not under God's control.

**Gentleness** is the opposite of asserting ourselves. The Lord said that the meek were the ultimate winners (Mt. 5:5). Those who are servants of the Lord must not strive to get their own way (II Timothy 2:24). Spirit-filled lives resist selfish ambition (James 3:16) because it is a reflection of Satan, not of God. Remember Jesus described Himself as 'meek and lowly' (Mt. 11:29).

**Personal checkup questions:**

Would people say that I am assertive or gentle?

Do I fight for my idea, plan, agenda, and preference, or am I willing to let another express their way?

What shape are my personal agenda and ambitions in: are they intact, and my rights being defended?

Or is my personal, self-driven agenda in hopeless shape, crucified with Christ and fading?

**Self-Control** is defined by the Greek Dictionary as "a virtue, which consists in mastery of the appetites and passions, especially the sensual ones." The only force that can control or flesh is the Holy Spirit. When yielded to Him we become vessels that are worshipful sacrifices to Him, and no longer to self. Self cannot control self. Flesh is not able to harness flesh. Only the Spirit can discipline us for godly living (Titus 2:11-13).

### **Personal checkup questions:**

Do I lead a disciplined life or an un-disciplined life?

Would others think of me as graciously under the control of God's Spirit?

Am I beating under and giving knockout blows to my flesh like Paul was in I Cor. 9:27?

Does it seem like God is taking over more and more of my life, my attention, and my schedule?

These nine reflections of God are produced by His Spirit in every part of our lives surrendered to Him. So, look inside, are these nine reflections of God present in your daily life? Are these manifestations of God's control growing?

## **BACK TO THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY USEFUL BELIEVERS**

See how completely connected together each of these elements that Christ taught, and that are portrayed in Acts & the Epistles?

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## **4. CONSECRATED: CULTIVATING SURRENDERED & CONSECRATED LIVING**

Paul capped his monumental doctrinal letter with a plea for regular, ongoing choices of surrender (Rom. 12:1-2): because we must keep presenting our bodies and seeking the renewing of our minds.

Romans 12:1-2 **I beseech** you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

## **5. CONNECTED: UNDERSTANDING PRAYER AS CONNECTED TO GOD**

Christ's teaching on the necessity and His example of personal prayer habits is a strong reminder (Mt. 6:9-13). Our prayer life always reflects how much we need, trust, and love our Lord.



## **6. INVESTED: UNDERSTANDING LIFE AS A STEWARDSHIP**

Christ's parables so often pointed at an accounting, or stewardship of our lives (Mt. 25:21,23). We all need to soberly remember that we are each given a lifetime that can be invested or not invested, for the Lord.

## **7. WATCHFUL: EXPECTING SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

Jesus went right from Baptism to the Wilderness of Temptation (Mt. 3:16-4:10); and so do most believers. The only difference is that He was prepared.

Jesus told us the way to survive is to “watch & pray” (Mt. 25:13; 26:41). We must learn to resist Satan’s neutralizing attempts at our desires to be: Serving in Christ's Church, Soul-winning as a lifestyle, maintaining Simplicity prompted usefulness & and experiencing the power of Scriptural Meditation.