

The cover image shows the title 'developing a DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE' in white text on a rustic wooden background. Below the title, an open book with a dark cover is visible, resting on the wooden surface. The text 'developing a' is in a smaller, lowercase font, while 'DISCIPLESHIP' and 'CULTURE' are in a larger, all-caps font.

developing a DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE

Key Elements of Discipleship & Disciplemaking

THE VILLAGE ORGANIC CHURCH NETWORK

Todd Stewart | 1st edition | January 1, 2019

Table of Contents

Pre-Study <i>Two Crucial Decisions</i>	2
Study #1: <i>Intro to Discipleship & Disciplemaking</i>	7
Study #2: <i>History of Disciplemaking</i>	10
Study #3: <i>Disciplemaking Motivation & Methodology</i>	19
Study #4: <i>Developing Thinking Disciples</i>	23
Study #5: <i>Philosophy of Ministry</i>	27
Study #6: <i>Principles of Spiritual Growth</i>	29
Study #7: <i>Disciples Who Embody the Character of Christ</i>	31
Study #8: <i>Counseling Focus: CONFLICT</i>	34
Study #9: <i>Counseling Focus: IMMORALITY</i>	36
Study #10: <i>Developing Key Ministry Skills</i>	40
Study #11: <i>Developing Prayerfulness</i>	43
Study #12: <i>Developing a Loving Life</i>	45
Study #13: <i>Persevering as Christ's Disciple</i>	47
 Appendix A: <i>Diagnosing anti-intellectualism</i> (JP Moreland).	50
Appendix B: <i>"Morality Makers" or "Made to be Moral"?</i>	65
Appendix C: <i>Dangers of IT Overuse</i> (Dennis McCallum).....	72

Before going any further, consider where you stand with Jesus...

Please take time to read through the following teaching outline. Be sure to open your Bible and study the passages that are cited and taught while reading the comments below. (NOTE: Although there have been some minor alterations for this packet, the original sermon was delivered by Gary DeLashmutt and can be found at <https://www.xenos.org/teachings/?teaching=24>)

TWO CRUCIAL DECISIONS

Introduction

As one studies the Gospel of Luke, chapter 9 presents the first climax of Jesus' public ministry. Every good story has tension that builds to a climax. Really good stories have several climaxes. This is not the great climax (the cross & resurrection), but rather a precursor climax which sets the stage for the big climax. This first climax takes place near Caesarea-Philippi, just before Jesus takes his fateful last journey to Jerusalem. It concerns two decisions by Jesus' disciples--one that they make in this passage, and another one that Jesus calls on them to make. As we will see, Jesus calls on you and me to make these same decisions. Let's look at Luke's account in Lk. 9 . . .

Decision #1

Read 9:18. The topic of conversation is Jesus' identity. Over a period of time, Jesus has attracted them and given them evidence of his uniqueness (MIRACLES, TEACHINGS, HIS LOVE). They have begun to wonder aloud who he is (8:25), but he hasn't answered. Now he initiates discussion about the question of his identity, first generally--"Who do *people* say that I am?"

Why is Jesus so concerned about this? Not because he is unsure about his identity and needed their affirmation, but because it is so important for them to be sure. Read 9:19. If Jesus was a postmodernist, he would have said: "Whatever they/you believe is cool." But he is asking because their belief about him needs to conform to who he really is in order to benefit from him.

That's why he moves from general to specific, putting them on the spot (read 9:20a): "Who do *you* say that I am?" Peter's answer is correct (9:20b). "Christ" was not Jesus' last name, but his title: God's anointed One; the Messiah. This statement cannot be interpreted in a relativistic, "New Age" way (one of many manifestations of God). Nor can it be interpreted to mean that Jesus was only a great prophet (9:19). It means that Jesus is God's Chosen One--the unique and sole Ruler of all humanity who fulfills the predictions of the Old Testament prophets.

This is the decision to agree with Jesus that he is your Messiah-Savior. This is the way Jesus dealt with his disciples, this is the way he dealt with me--and this is the way he will deal with you. In a personal way, over a period of time, and through a variety of means, he will attract you, get you thinking about him, expose your spiritual need, provide you with evidence, etc. (THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE; EXPOSURE TO BIBLE; SUFFERING). This is a *process* which he does not rush--but it leads to a *point*. He will ultimately call for a decision (like a response to a PROPOSAL) because he wants a love relationship with you--and a love relationship requires a positive response by both parties.

Becoming a Christian requires the crisis of decision. This is the most important decision you will ever make because your standing with God and your eternal destiny literally depend upon your answer. There is a point in time before which you are separated from God, guilty before him, and headed for judgment. And there is a point in time after which you are reconciled to God, forgiven by him, and assured of eternal life. And the point in time that separates these two states is the point of decision--your decision to personally entrust yourself to Jesus as your Savior-Messiah (Jn. 5:24; Rom. 10:9).

Have you made the decision to personally entrust yourself to Jesus? If not, what stands in the way? Is it the need for more information or evidence? Then by all means get it--Jesus wants you to make an informed, intelligent decision. Do you know how? Or do you have enough evidence and know-how--but you're afraid? I certainly understand this--but please don't put it off!

Read 9:21. No sooner do they give the correct answer than Jesus tells them to not tell a soul! Why is this--especially since a few weeks later told them to go tell everyone? The reason for this is their faulty understanding of what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah.

The "grid" through which first-century Jews understood the word "Messiah" was that of a victorious, conquering king who vanquished Israel's enemies and established God's kingdom over all the earth. This was the clear picture described by the Old Testament prophets (read Dan. 7:13,14).

Their view was correct, but incomplete. He will ultimately come as a ruling, reigning King in what we call his "second Coming." But the Old Testament prophets also predicted that he must come to suffer and die ("Anonymous Servant >> read 9:22). Why? Because this is necessary to resolve the root problem of humanity. Before we are eligible to enter and enjoy God's kingdom, we need internal cleansing and forgiveness that we cannot provide for ourselves. Jesus provided that for us through his substitutionary death. Had he fulfilled their expectations, no one would have been qualified to enter the kingdom he began!!

The disciples didn't grasp this--partly because the "ruling King" prophecies were *clearer*, but partly because they were also *preferable*. It is clear from subsequent conversations about this that the disciples wanted to use Jesus' Messiahship to avoid suffering and to exalt themselves (see Mark 10:35ff.; Matt. 16:22,23). If you get indignant about this, you really don't know yourself very well! This is what we all want to do with Jesus, even after we confess

him as the Messiah. Praise God, he is so gracious that he accepts us even with this faulty faith. But he also addresses it, and this is why Jesus faces them (and us) with another crucial decision . . .

Decision #2

Read 9:23. On one level, this statement is directed primarily to Jesus' disciples. But on another level, Jesus is speaking beyond his immediate disciples to the others who were listening ("He was saying to them *all*")--and in principle all who confess him as Messiah.

What does it mean for us to "deny ourselves and take up our crosses?" This has been grossly misinterpreted, so let's contrast what it doesn't mean to what it does mean.

To "deny yourself" has nothing to do with rejecting your individual identity, as with monistic spirituality. God made us as individual selves, and Jesus will speak in the next verse of how important it is to preserve our individual soul identities. Neither does it have anything to do with denying yourself all personal desires, as with asceticism. God approves of legitimate pleasure (Matt. 11:19), and he delights in giving us the desires of our hearts when they conform to his will for our lives (Ps. 37:4).

Rather, it means to deny self-rule, and to voluntarily follow Jesus and let him take the leadership of your life. Jesus said that he didn't come to do his own will, but to do the will of the Father who sent him. He wasn't going down to Jerusalem to pursue a dream he'd always had; he was going down to Jerusalem because the Father said that he had to go to the Cross to save humanity. He wasn't following his feelings--he was following God's will ("not what I desire, but your will be done").

In the same way, to follow Jesus simply means what it says--you are *following* Jesus. You lay down the right to do your own will, or to tell Jesus to follow you--and instead voluntarily agree to do what he asks you to do (even against your feelings). This is a fundamental handing over of the control of your life to him who has proved his love and wisdom to you--and then a day-by-day, situation-by-situation reaffirmation of this decision.

To "take up your cross" does not mean that you look for ways to suffer, as in masochism. The Bible never tells us to seek out suffering. Nor does it mean that you spiritualize every suffering that comes your way (e.g., sickness; consequences of your sins) as sufferings laid on you by God.

Rather, it means understanding that following Jesus will involve experiencing suffering at the hands of those who are opposed to Jesus--and to still decide to follow him into and through that suffering. Before the disciples decided to follow Jesus down to Jerusalem, they needed to understand that they weren't going to his coronation--but to his crucifixion. Jesus understood this--and he still decided to go because it was the only way to save the lost

people that he loved. And if his disciples wanted to go to Jerusalem with him, they needed to realize that they wouldn't be welcomed as heroes; they could get crucified with him.

In the same way, if you decide to follow Jesus, you need to realize that this decision will result in hostility from people in your life. This should never be because you are being self-righteous or obnoxious; we should be loving and humble. But it will come anyway, because your commitment to Jesus exposes and convicts others of their hostility toward Jesus. It may cause painful conflict in your family because you won't play your role in the family dysfunction anymore. (Notice how Jesus uses this same expression in Matt. 10:34-38). It may cost you friends who mock you because you won't get wasted with them anymore (1 Pet. 4:4). It may cost you advancement in your career because you refuse to cut ethical corners or make your job your #1 priority. In many countries, it may get you imprisoned or killed because you won't agree to stop sharing the love of Jesus with people (Acts 4,5).

SUMMARY: So *this is the decision to follow Jesus wherever he leads you--in spite of the cost.* For most of us, this second decision comes into focus sometime after we have made the first decision. After receiving Jesus for primarily selfish reasons, you experience his love and trustworthiness and goodness. You get a taste of the joy of serving him. Then, at a time of his choosing, he confronts you with the challenge to sell out to him--to give your whole life to him (BODY; TIME; PLANS; RELATIONSHIPS; GOALS; DREAMS; MONEY & POSSESSIONS). After you make this decision, you will need to affirm it over and over again ("daily") as further implications reveal themselves.

Is this decision costly? Yes! Anything precious is costly. Is it worth it? Yes--and the benefits far outweigh the costs! That's exactly what Jesus goes on to point out (read 9:24). This paradoxical statement is easy to understand if you remember that it is simply elaborating on the previous verse.

To "save your life" is synonymous with not denying yourself or taking up your cross to follow Jesus. While you're counting the cost of following Jesus, be sure to also count the cost of not following him! Our culture may tell us that the path to happiness is avoiding suffering at all costs and getting whatever we desire--but Jesus says (and experience confirms) that this is the prescription for real misery. What does it matter if you get every material thing you want from this life--but you miss out on intimacy with Jesus and the fulfillment of his purpose for your life (9:25)? What does it matter you avoid conflict and gain approval with your human audience--but you failed in the real mission of your life?

To "lose your life for my sake" is synonymous with denying yourself and taking up your cross to follow Jesus. Your fallen heart and many people in your life may tell you that following Jesus is a foolish choice that you're bound to regret--but Jesus says that this is the one choice that will guarantee true and lasting fulfillment in your life.

Have you ever made the decision to give your whole life to Jesus? This is the only thing that will ever satisfy you. If you have never given your life to Christ, why not do so today?

The chart below helps to highlight some of the differences that accompany living as a disciple of Jesus...

Disciples willingly commit to become...

- Zealous Learners, not Zoned out & Lazy
- Fixed & Firm, not Flaky & Floating
- Servant-Hearted, not Self-Absorbed
- “Made for Morality”, not “Morality-Makers”
- Obedient, not Obstinate or Omissive
- Faith-Driven, not Feeling-Driven
- Forward-Failers, not Failure-Fearers
- Fueled by Grace, not Forgetful of Grace
- Accountable to one another as disciples
- Dependent upon God for energy & growth

What questions and comments do you have after doing this study?

If you are committed to living as Jesus’ disciple, then move on to Study #1...

Study #1: Introduction to Discipleship & Disciplemaking

Before going further, we need to clarify two key (and often confusing) terms. This packet is entitled *Developing a Discipleship Culture*. But what is meant by “discipleship.” Many Christians also know they are called to discipling. Is discipleship the same as discipling, or are the two concepts distinct? For the purpose of clarity, in this packet we will use the following definitions:

Discipleship = each believer’s process of becoming more like Jesus; synonymous with sanctification, transformation, spiritual growth, etc.

Disciplemaking = the personalized process through which one believer intentionally guides another believer(s) in their shared pursuit of following Jesus.

However, you really can’t divorce the two terms, and here’s why...

At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus left his disciples with the following direction. Many refer to this instruction as Jesus’ “marching orders,” or more popularly as “The Great Commission.”

Matthew 28 -- ¹⁶The 11 disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

There are several elements that warrant highlighting within this crucial text, and several implications we need to be aware of that follow from Jesus’ teaching here...

1. ***The controlling, primary command in the passage is to “make disciples.”*** All of the other instruction informs what “making disciples” generally looks like.
2. ***The two crucial decisions (from the introductory study) are evident in this passage.***

“Making disciples” must **first** include leading someone to accept Christ. Once someone accepts Christ, they are put into God’s family (the Greek word *baptizo* literally means “to put into”). John 1:12 puts the same concept a different way: “But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God...”

After someone accepts God's grace through Christ, then the second decision comes into play: choosing whether or not to "observe everything I have commanded you." All true believers grapple with the challenge of following Jesus in every area of life, but a disciple is someone committed to the call to follow Jesus in everything.

3. ***"Making disciples" is included within the concept of "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you."*** Thus, Christian discipleship inherently must include discipling. As a result, it is difficult to envision a maturing Christian who puts no effort into Jesus' clarion call to make disciples!
4. ***If discipling is such a central priority, then we'd expect God's enemy to vehemently oppose it.*** We will examine this facet more in the study on *The History of Discipling*.
5. ***The difficulty of the task means that you need to be clearly convinced that this is God's will AND God's best for you and for the church.*** Hopefully this study can help solidify your discipling convictions.
6. ***As is true with any difficult and complex activity, we will need to invest substantial time understanding and learning how to effectively make disciples.*** If doctors of the human body require countless hours training, then why would the same not be true for doctors of the human mind and soul?
7. ***Effectiveness in discipling should be a key qualification for leadership in the church.*** In Matthew 25, Jesus highlights the principle of proving one's faithfulness via the Parable of the Talents. In verse 23 Jesus drives home the point, "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy!'" This concept operates in nearly every other sphere of life, so why wouldn't it operate in the identification of leaders within the church?

For further study, consider reading the classic book [*The Master Plan of Evangelism*](#). In this book, Robert Coleman lays out a clear case that Jesus put discipling at the center of his ministry...and Jesus intends for us to do the same...

As important as the above points may be, we'd be remiss if we did not take note of the key provisions Jesus has given to us for the monumental task of making disciples. Let's look at our primary text again:

Matthew 28 -- ¹⁶The 11 disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Since Jesus knew discipling would be Satanically opposed and that our persistence would be perpetually tested, he promised us:

1. ***All of his authority*** – “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples...” Notice Jesus’ logic here. Since Jesus has been given ALL authority, “therefore” we should go and make disciples. If we attempt to make disciples in our own authority and power, then we will abuse people or fear people or quickly grow weary of the task.
2. ***He would be with us always*** – “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Seeking to lead in the name of God can be excruciatingly lonely work. How comforting to know that Jesus is with us always especially as we engage in his call to make disciples!

Discussion Questions:

1. Where do you find yourself currently with the principles outlined in this study? Bought in? Just starting? Unconvinced? Struggling to persevere?
2. What do you see as some of the key hurdles keeping discipling from taking root and flourishing in your life and church?
3. What might a church look and feel like if most of its people were actively engaged in discipling?

Study #2: A History of Disciplemaking¹

If discipling is indeed one of God's highest priorities, then we moderns would expect it to be clearly outlined and illustrated in the Bible in catalog form. However, our desire for the Bible to contain an efficiently laid out, step-by-step discipleship program is destined for frustration. For one, the Bible was not written to appease the modern scientific method of inquiry. In addition, God chose to entrust His truth largely to oral cultures that passed on principles via real stories, creative illustrations, and personal correspondence. Nevertheless, although we won't find a discipleship program laid out in the Bible, God has left us with numerous real examples that bring to life various aspects of effective discipling. In fact, discipling principles are so profoundly transforming that secular cultures have been using these methods for millennia as well. Since the Bible comes to us largely via Hebrew and Greek cultures, we will focus our study on their histories in this brief packet.

Discipling in Hebrew Society

The Old Testament (OT) lacks a "Great Commission" type of statement. Nevertheless, we need to be careful not to let this lead us to conclude the Hebrews had no category for discipleship or discipling. The following observations actually should lead us to conclude that the Hebrews had a well-developed category of discipleship and mentoring.

- The Greeks introduced the terms we translate as disciple or discipleship in their translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (The Septuagint).
 - **Μανθάνω** (manthano) = "to learn; specifically the process of understanding and embracing God's ways" (from Septuagint)
 - **Μαθητής** (matheiteis) = "disciple, student, follower; a committed learner and follower"
- There is evidence of discipling in custom & instruction throughout the OT. Consider and discuss the following examples...

JETHRO & MOSES

Exodus 18 -- ¹² Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in God's presence. ¹³ The next day Moses sat down to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening. ¹⁴ When Moses' father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, "What is this thing you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" ¹⁵ Moses replied to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach them God's statutes and laws." ¹⁷ "What you're doing is not good," Moses' father-in-

¹ Although the study on *The History of Discipling* is important for building long-term understanding and commitment, some readers may want to skip this section to move on to more pressing needs.

law said to him. ¹⁸“You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can’t do it alone.”¹⁹ Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him. ²⁰Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. ²¹But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place them over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²²They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every important case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear it with you. ²³If you do this, and God so directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied.”

According to the text, why was Moses’ method of leadership “not good”?

What did Jethro promise would happen if Moses shifted to equipping & empowering a few?

Ironically, the leadership insights in the biblical text above come from Jethro who was a Midianite (not a Hebrew). Verse 24ff. shows that Moses saw the wisdom in the instruction, and thus set a very important pattern for Israel – that God’s people ought not be led by super-elevated leaders who develop a cult of personality around them.

MOSES & JOSHUA

Exodus 17:13-15 -- ¹³So Joshua defeated Amalek and his army with the sword. ¹⁴The Lord then said to Moses, “Write this down on a scroll as a reminder and recite it to Joshua: I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven.” ¹⁵And Moses built an altar and named it, “The Lord Is My Banner.”

Exodus 24:12-14 -- ¹²The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and stay there so that I may give you the stone tablets with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.” ¹³So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua and went up the mountain of God. ¹⁴He told the elders, “Wait here for us until we return to you. Aaron and Hur are here with you. Whoever has a dispute should go to them.”

Exodus 33:10-11 -- ¹⁰As all the people saw the pillar of cloud remaining at the entrance to the tent, they would stand up, then bow in worship, each one at the door of his tent. ¹¹The Lord spoke with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks with his friend. Then

Moses would return to the camp, but his assistant, the young man Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the inside of the tent.

Numbers 27:18-23 -- ¹⁸The Lord replied to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him. ¹⁹Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole community, and commission him in their sight. ²⁰Confer some of your authority on him so that the entire Israelite community will obey him. ²¹He will stand before Eleazar who will consult the Lord for him with the decision of the Urim. He and all the Israelites with him, even the entire community, will go out and come back in at his command.” ²²Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua, had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire community, ²³laid his hands on him, and commissioned him, as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

What key principles do you see guiding Moses’ development of Joshua?

OTHER OT EXAMPLES

Samuel & the prophets (1 Sam. 19:20-24)

Elijah & Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21)

Elisha & the sons of the prophets (2 Kings 4, 9)

Jeremiah & Baruch (Jeremiah 36)

The scribal tradition (Ezra 7; Proverbs 25:1)

Some astute observers have pointed out that *all these examples point to situations focused on leadership development and/or training in the passing on of God’s Word* (Thus, there is no clear example of “normal” Israelites doing this). This argument is often used to justify “normal” believers not needing to develop a ministry of personal disciplinemaking. Not only does Matthew 28 later rule out this conclusion, but the OT also clearly teaches personal disciplinemaking as a “normal” expectation for all of God’s people. Take note of the following passage in Deuteronomy which was written to all the people:

Deuteronomy 11 -- ¹⁸“Imprint these words of mine on your hearts and minds, bind them as a sign on your hands, and let them be a symbol on your foreheads.¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹so that as long as the heavens are above the earth, your days and those of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your fathers. ²²For if you carefully observe every one of these commands I am giving you to follow—to love the Lord your God, walk in all His

ways, and remain faithful to Him— ²³the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will drive out nations greater and stronger than you are.

DISCIPLEMAKING IN HEBREW SOCIETY AFTER OT

The Rabbinic Movement arose prior to Jesus' day in order to prepare & instruct people how to live pure lives before God & to prepare people for adequate worship at the temple. The Pharisees were intimately connected to this movement.

Who were the rabbis? They were Jewish men who had been trained by other leading Jewish scholars to rightly interpret & apply Torah. Among the famous and influential rabbis were Hillel, Shammai, & Gamaliel (Paul tells us he trained under/was discipled by Gamaliel).

What was their basis of authority? The chains of their tradition & rulings of previous rabbis provided them authority. In fact, most rabbis spent more time studying traditions than the actual Scriptures.

How did they train their followers? The following list briefly describes the rabbinic training methods and assumptions:

- Followers came and asked to learn from them
- To listen to & study the scriptures without the guidance of a teacher was to be avoided at all costs
- Learning was determined by the rabbi and his interpretation of the Scriptures
- The disciple then appropriated and examined his rabbi's teaching by comparing it against Scripture
- Only those who had been trained by another rabbinic scholar could accept their own followers
- Various schools of interpretation eventually formed

Obviously, we are espousing the conclusion that we should do everything that the rabbis did. The point of this brief overview is to merely highlight that discipleship via discipling was engrained into Hebrew culture during and after the OT.

Disciplemaking in Greek Society

As already noted above, the Greek term **Μαθητής (matheiteis)**= "learner, pupil, disciple." According to *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, "A man is called a disciple (in Greek culture) when he **binds** himself to someone else in order to acquire his practical and theoretical knowledge." The discipling method was widespread in philosophical schools and also in various trades. Although discipleship as a method remained a staple of Greek society, the preferred usage of terms evolved over time.

Evolution of terms...

From Socrates onward, the term μαθητής (“matheiteis”) was not often used by philosophers because it had become so associated with corrupted commercialism & the impersonal nature of the Sophists. Thus, alternate words came into use such as “friend” or “follower.” This historical evolution helps explain why we don’t observe the term “disciplemaking” in the later NT. In addition, understanding the linguistic changes sheds additional insight on what Jesus was meaning when he spoke to his disciples in the Upper Room on the night he was betrayed:

John 15:13-15 -- ¹³No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you slaves anymore, because a slave doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father.

SUMMARY & DIFFERENCES IN DISCIPLEMAKING GOALS & METHODS

<i>Rabbinic Judaism</i>	<i>Greek Philosophy</i>	<i>Jesus</i>
Followers approached the teacher voluntarily	Followers approached the teacher voluntarily	Jesus chose & called His disciples
Primary content & authority was the rabbi’s interpretive tradition & its commentary on Scripture	Primary content & authority was the teacher’s philosophical paradigm	Jesus spoke with authority on Scripture & the nature of things; He was the way, truth, & life
Called upon disciples to master interpretive traditions & purify conduct in this life	Called upon disciples to master philosophical paradigm & then apply it ethically in this life	Jesus pointed disciples to live in the future dawn of the Kingdom of God which is “at hand”
Disciples committed to living a ritually pure life according to their interpretive tradition	Disciples committed to making sense of this life according to their chosen paradigm	Disciples committed to living as pilgrims; they can expect to suffer like their Master
Elitism – devoted disciples separated themselves from the ritually unclean & were ethically superior	Elitism – devoted disciples had little to do with common folk & were educationally superior	Love – devoted disciples went to the sinners & outcasts just like their Master; a life of love was ultimate; all called to disciple
Sexism – no women allowed	Sexism – no women allowed	Egalitarian – women were included at an unheard of level

Much has been written on Jesus and discipling, and rightly so. In later studies we will draw from and point out Jesus' methods. However, our current study dictates that we address the fairly common question: "If discipling was so important, then why didn't anybody other than Jesus make disciples in the NT?"

DISCIPLEMaking IN THE REST OF THE NT

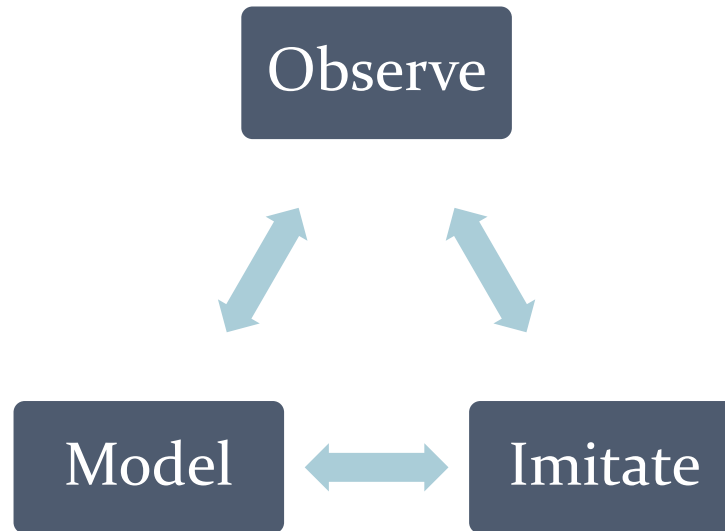
Below is a very brief outline overviewing some of the other instances of discipling in the NT. The focus is on Paul because we have so much more information about Paul's life and ministry than we do the other early church leaders.

The Life & Ministry of Paul:

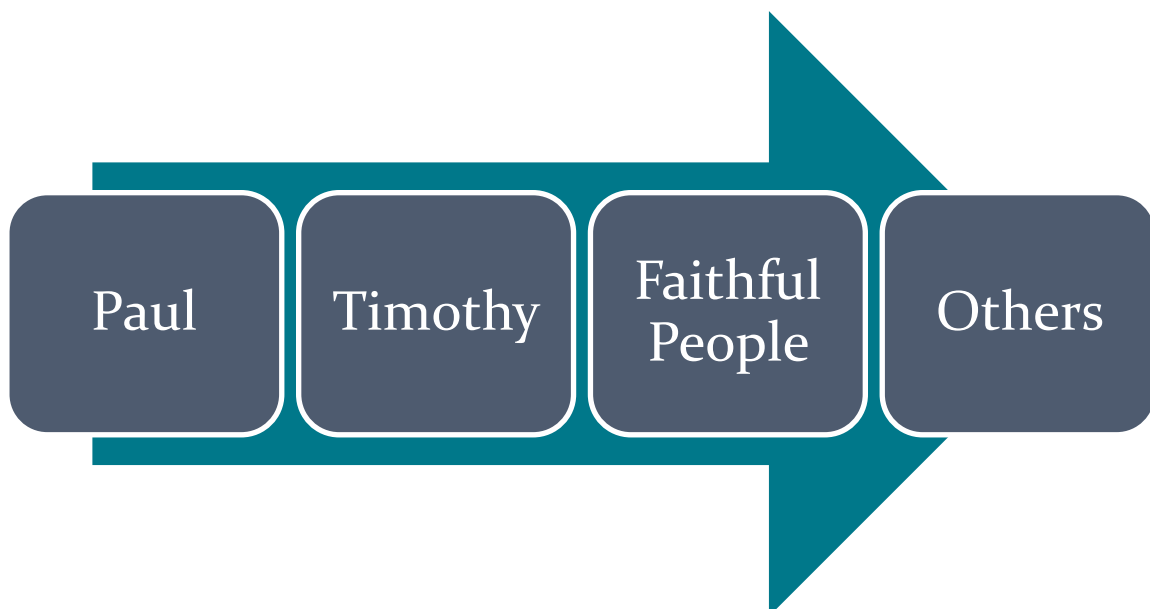
- **Paul's life:**
 - Was disciplined by Gamaliel within Judaism prior to becoming a Christian (Acts 22:3)
 - Was disciplined by Barnabas after becoming a Christian (Acts 9:26-30; 11:22-30)
- **Paul's initial ministry:**
 - Immediately developed disciples after believing in Jesus
 - **Acts 9:23-25** -- ²³After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him, ²⁵but **his disciples** took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall.
- **Continued to intentionally disciple as he matured in Christ:**
 - **Acts 16:1-5** -- Then he went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. ²The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. ³Paul wanted Timothy to go with him, so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for them to observe. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.
 - **Acts 20:4** -- ⁴He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.
- **His philosophy of ministry explanation reveals discipling principles**
 - **1 Thess. 1:5-8** -- Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. You observed what kind of men we were among you for your benefit, ⁶and you became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit. ⁷As a result, you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸For the

Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out.

- **1 Thess. 2:8** -- We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.
 - *In the 1 Thessalonians text, we see that Paul's personal ministry model can be reduced to three intertwined and self-replicating principles:*



- **He commanded others to practice these principles**
 - **2 Tim. 2:1-2** -- You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.



- **Titus 2:3-5** -- ³In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴so they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, ⁵to be self-controlled, pure, homemakers, kind, and submissive to their husbands, so that God's message will not be slandered.

HOW DID THE EARLY CHURCH TRAIN LEADERS TO KEEP UP WITH RAPID GROWTH?

Some Observations:

- No seminaries (but did use classes sometimes – Acts 19)
- They apparently employed the discipling method
- They were motivated by a real sense of urgency
- They took risks with entrusting churches to relatively young believers because they had no other choice
 - But this meant they needed ongoing encouragement & equipping
- They had to lead them through ongoing challenges
 - *Wrote letters*
 - *Made visits*
 - *Sent emissaries*
 - *PRAYED FERVENTLY!*

What similarities and differences do you see between the early church's circumstances and methods, and those of our church today?

After the rapid growth of the primitive church, discipling was largely lost. What do you think might be some reasons for this suspicious disappearance?

HOW AND WHY DID DISCIPLEMAKING DISAPPEAR?

Initially due to attempts to lead well...

- ***Prominence of false teaching caused leaders to tighten up on who could lead and teach in the church***
 - Eventually the clergy (specialized ordained people) were the only ones allowed to read & interpret the Bible publicly
 - Final step was to outlaw translating the Bible into local languages
 - Clergy became mediators between the people and God

Initially due to events that seemed very hopeful...

- ***Conversion of the emperor Constantine & the subsequent Edict of Milan in 313 which legalized Christian worship***
 - Removed the threat of persecution
 - Established precedent for the emperor to have a role within leadership of the church
- ***Declaration that Christianity was the official religion of the Roman empire in 380***
 - Forced conversions
 - Little interest in disciplinemaking & evangelism
 - State now had full interest in overseeing the leadership of their official church (the church was a key method to keep social order which was a very high Roman cultural value)
 - Eventually Roman = Christian

Due to Satan's designs...

- Knew that if he could get normal people excluded from reading & learning the Bible, then disciplinemaking would be lost.
- Knew that if he could get leadership in the hands of a fearful few, then disciplinemaking would be lost.
- Knew that if the threat of persecution was removed, then the church would become soft and disciplinemaking would be lost.
- Knew that if there was no perceived need for evangelism, then disciplinemaking would be lost.
- Knew that if the church was entrusted with enormous worldly resources, then disciplinemaking would be lost.

What might be some threats to disciplinemaking in your life and in the life of our church?

Study #3: Disciplemaking Motivation & Methodology

MOTIVATION MATTERS...

1 Thess. 2 -- For you yourselves know, brothers, that our visit with you was not without result. ²On the contrary, after we had previously suffered, and we were treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition. ³For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive. ⁴Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but rather God, who examines our hearts. ⁵For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives—God is our witness— ⁶and we didn't seek glory from people, either from you or from others.

What “motivation matters” do you observe in this passage?

Vs. 1 – “For you yourselves know, brothers, that our visit with you was not without result.”

Paul clearly values, and draws his audience to recall, tangible results that came from his time among them. 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 outlines the primary results Paul is referring to (re-read this if you need a refresher). From this and various other passages, we can observe that results matter and should be evaluated. However, tangible results become dangerous when they are a primary motivation for ministry and disciplemaking. The rest of the passage clarifies some of the reasons why motivation matters in building a personal disciplemaking ministry.

Poor or Unstable Motivations:

Discuss why each of the following are poor ministry motivations

Vs. 2 – “...after we had previously suffered, and we were treated outrageously in Philippi...”

- ***Comfort, convenience, & acceptance are unstable ministry motivations***

Vs. 3 – “For our exhortation didn't come from error or impurity or an intent to deceive.”

- Many other leaders in the ancient (and modern) world intentionally led others astray merely so that they (the leader) could gain a personal following. Thus, we see here that ***merely building a following is a poor ministry motivation.***

Vs. 4 – “...not to please men...”

- The NT repeatedly holds forth the ***danger of living to please people*** (see. Gal 1:10 & Matthew 6 for starters).

Vs. 5-6 – “For we never used flattering speech, as you know, or had greedy motives—God is our witness—⁶ and we didn’t seek glory from people, either from you or from others.”

- ***Manipulating others for personal gain will corrupt any ministry***

Good or Stable Motivations:

Discuss why each of the following are good & stable ministry motivations

Vs. 2 – “...we were emboldened by our God to speak the gospel of God to you in spite of great opposition...”

- ***Being empowered by God to boldly speak God’s gospel is a good & stable motivation***

Vs. 4 – “Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but rather God, who examines our hearts.”

- ***Gratitude for the Gospel is an enduring & empowering motivation***
- ***Gratitude for the gift of ministry is also an enduring & empowering motivation***
 - See 2 Cor. 4:1 for another instance of how receiving ministry as a gift leads to perseverance in ministry
- ***Pleasing God (out of a place of already being fully accepted by God) is an enduring & empowering motivation***

METHODOLOGY MATTERS...

1 Thess. 2 -- ⁷Although we could have been a burden as Christ’s apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children. ⁸We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. ⁹For you remember our labor and hardship, brothers. Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God’s gospel to you. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and so is God, of how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you believers. ¹¹As you know, like a father with his own children, ¹²we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

What “methodology matters” do you observe in this passage?

Vs. 7 – “Although we could have been a burden as Christ’s apostles...”

- ***We should reject ministry methods that put an unnecessary burden upon new or immature believers***

Vs. 7,11 – “...we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother nurtures her own children . . .

¹¹As you know, like a father with his own children, ¹²we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God...

- ***In some ways, disciplemaking is like spiritual parenting*** (but be careful not to push this analogy too far!):
 - **As a parent, my goal is to raise my children to become the following type of adults:**
 - *Independently-motivated*
 - *Personally-responsible*
 - *Complex-thinking*
 - *Relationally-empathetic*
 - **In order to accomplish this overwhelming goal, parents must resist:**
 - *Helicopter parenting*
 - *Laissez faire parenting*
 - *Perfectionistic parenting*
- ***Developing mature disciples requires ongoing wisdom and flexible tactics based upon the disciples stage of growth, temperament, and the multitude of situations that will arise in the growth process.***

Vs. 8 – “We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.”

- ***Genuinely caring for disciples is a key method that informs all other methods***
 - “Invest until you feel affection.” (Gary DeLashmutt)
- ***Expressing genuine affection for disciples is a powerful motivator, especially when the affection has true substance***
 - This is what Paul is doing by writing these words!
- ***Our discipleship of others must be centered in the “gospel of God”***
 - Ultimately, we are helping others live as disciples of Jesus (not of us)
 - Divorcing the message & content from discipleship leads to shallow change & cracked foundations
- ***Our discipleship of others must include us openly sharing our lives***
 - **Mark 3:14** -- He also appointed 12—He also named them apostles—to ***be with Him***, to send them out to preach...
 - Divorcing our real lives & relationship from discipleship leads to impersonal & stale communication
 - One of the key things we must teach disciples is how to respond to failure (study the life of Peter for some great insights on this!)

WHAT ARE THE KEY AREAS WE WORK IN WHILE DISCIPLING OTHERS?

Thoughts
Skills

Character
Affections

WHAT DO WE DO TO PARTNER WITH GOD TO DEVELOP WISE DISCIPLES?

Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>In order to transform thinking to become like Christ's</i>	Counsel <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>In order to transform character to become like Christ's</i>
Coach <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>In order to transform ministry skills to become like Christ's</i>	Pray <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>In order to transform affections to become like Christ's</i>

The following content is arranged according to the four discipleship quadrants above:

STUDY – Studies 4-6

COUNSEL - Studies 7-9, 12-13

COACH - Study 10

PRAY - Study 11

Study #4: Developing Thinking Disciples²

Read Appendix A: Diagnosing anti-intellectualism

WHY, WHAT & HOW SHOULD WE STUDY WITH DISCIPLES?

A Biblical Case for the Need to Prioritize STUDY in Disciplemaking

Colossians 1 -- You have already heard about this hope in the message of truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and recognized God's grace in the truth. You learned this from Epaphras, our dearly loved fellow servant. He is a faithful servant of the Messiah on your behalf, ⁸ and he has told us about your love in the Spirit.

What had the Colossians “learned from Epaphras”? What impact was this “learning” having upon their lives and world?

Colossians 1 -- ⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. ¹⁴We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, in Him.

What were the primary things that Paul was praying for the Colossians?

² Prior to doing this study, it is strongly recommended that you read *Diagnosing Anti-Intellectualism* by J.P. Moreland, which can be found in Appendix A.

Romans 12 -- Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your reasonable response of worship. ²Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

According to Paul in this passage, what leads to transformation and discernment?

2 Corinthians 10 -- ³For though we live in the body, we do not wage war in an unspiritual way, ⁴since the weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments ⁵and every high-minded (falsely elevated) thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to obey Christ.

According to Paul in this passage, what is the primary focus of spiritual warfare? What is the primary battleground?

Ephesians 4 -- ¹¹And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. ¹⁴Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. ¹⁶From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

According to Paul in this passage, what is the primary purpose of biblical leadership? What is the poison he is concerned about? What is the antidote in this passage?

WHAT SHOULD WE STUDY WITH THOSE WE DISCIPLE?

How to interpret and apply the Bible

Luke 24 -- ⁴⁴Then He told them, “These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high.”

Key Observations from How Jesus Studied the Bible with His Disciples:

Vs. 45 -- “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”

- ***Christian study is not merely an academic exercise. With each topic we need the Lord to open our minds, hearts, & wills...***

Vs. 44b – “that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

- ***Study how the whole Bible fits together by identifying the major themes...***
- ***Study how the whole Bible ultimately points to Christ...***

Vs. 46-47 – “⁴⁶He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

- ***Study the importance of fulfilled prophecy***
 - For apologetic evidence
 - For inspiration of Bible
 - For personal comfort & expectation of 2nd Coming

Other important aspects Jesus is highlighting in this Bible study with His disciples:

- ***The importance of progressive revelation***
 - **Genesis 3:15** -- I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.
 - Super unclear prophecy, but later becomes clear with more revelation from God
 - **Hebrews 1** -- Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ²In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son.
 - God’s full revelation is in Jesus Christ
- ***The importance of types***
 - **Hebrews 9** -- ⁶With these things set up this way, the priests enter the first room repeatedly, performing their ministry. ⁷But the high

priest alone enters the second room, and he does that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸ The Holy Spirit was making it clear that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed while the first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹ **This is a symbol (a type) for the present time**, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the worshiper's conscience. ¹⁰ They are physical regulations and only deal with food, drink, and various washings imposed until the time of restoration.

- Most of Hebrews is about how Jesus fulfilled the numerous types (or shadows) from the OT

Vs. 48 – “You are witnesses of these things.”

- ***Study how to effectively communicate all of these things to others*** (especially those the disciple is reaching out to or discipling)

Remember, although this study seems to be a formal session, Jesus also constantly taught the disciples through shared and evaluated experience.

A few key biblical books to master (in no particular order)

Hebrews – thorough teaching on how to understand the OT in light of Christ & how Christ's coming fulfilled & changed things...

Luke – narrative that announces & describes how Jesus is the Savior for all humanity (Luke was likely the only Gentile author in the NT)

Ephesians – thorough unpacking of the nature of grace & how to apply it individually & corporately (start here because it is shorter than *Romans*)

Genesis – the foundational book of the whole Bible; important to master ch. 1-3 in order to understand humanity & to be able to discuss creation theories

Acts – historical study of the progress of the early church; important for understanding background of many letters; helps demonstrate the historical reliability of the Bible

Psalms – the prayer book of God's people; accesses & expresses passionate, emotional, truth-focused relating with God

But don't stop with these six! Keep reading and studying...

What has been your experience building an ability to interpret & apply the whole Bible?

Study #5: Philosophy of Ministry³

2 Cor. 5 -- ¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If One died for all, then all died. ¹⁵And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.... ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. ¹⁸Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us.

We offer & explain God's grace to others motivated by God's grace to us...

- "For Christ's love compels us"
- "He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised"
- "Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"

Ephesians 4 -- ¹¹And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. ¹⁴Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. ¹⁶From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.

What key elements of ministry philosophy do you observe in this text? Make observations on your own and with your discipler prior to moving on to the next page.

³ For a thorough study of this topic, *Members of One Another* by Dennis McCallum is highly recommended.

Vs. 11a – “And He personally gave...”

- ***Jesus gifts the church with what He sovereignly chooses to help the church build itself up in love “by the proper working of each individual part.”***
- ***Our gifts are according to God’s grand design, and we are called to steward them for His purposes.***

Vs. 11b – “some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,”

- ***Jesus gives plurality and variety of leadership to guide the church***

Vs. 12 – “for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ,”

- ***The primary purpose of leadership (whatever the leader’s gifting) is to train other believers (“the saints”) in the work of ministry***
 - Matthew 28:18-20 gives us a clear picture of the primary work of ministry all believers are called to

Vs. 13 – “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.”

- ***A big part of ministry is training people to live in unity***
- ***Maturity is defined as living united together pursuing the mission of knowing and becoming like Christ***

Vs. 14 – “Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.”

- ***If we fail to follow the above instructions, we will be like vulnerable deception-prone little children***
- ***The best defense against false teaching is thoroughly training an army of believers who are armed with and skilled in handling the truth!***

Vs. 15 – “But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ.”

- ***“speaking the truth in love” is often misinterpreted:***
 - Some take it to mean that we have to be soft and squeamish while speaking truth that others won’t accept or will even be offended by
 - Some take it to mean that we can pound people harshly with truth as long as we assure the person we love them
- ***“speaking the truth in love” must be interpreted in context:***
 - Thus, we speak the truth to one another as we live together in an interdependent fellowship that prioritizes the work of ministry

Vs. 16 – “From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.”

- ***Every part of the church body must properly do the work of ministry for the church to grow and be built up according to God’s design***

For further study check out [Organic Discipleship](#) and [Loving God's Way](#)

Study #6: Principles of Spiritual Growth

Although there is no one passage that exhaustively teaches all principles of spiritual growth, we find Romans 12:1-2 to be very instructive on the topic.

Romans 12 -- Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your reasonable response of worship. ²Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Take some time alone or with your discipler to read through the entire passage above, and then take time to ponder each phrase in light of the whole (and its surrounding context).

What does this passage teach us about spiritual growth?

Principle #1: *We are saved by grace and growth is empowered by God's grace.*

- This is what the “Therefore” is there for in Romans 12:1. Paul is calling his readers to recall his argument in ch. 1-11, which essentially proves that all humans are in need of God's saving grace given via Christ's death and resurrection.
 - Regular reflective response to God's grace brings growth & gratitude
 - If we regularly read and reflect upon God's Word (giving special attention to the NT), then we will constantly find ourselves pondering God's grace and its relevance to literally every area of our lives.

Principle #2: *Since a believer's identity is secure in Christ, we are called to strongly urge one another to live in a way that is pleasing to God.*

- The word “urge” is from the Greek παρακαλέω (parakaleo) which can also mean exhort, admonish, persuade, beg, etc.

Principle #3: *We grow as we move away from individualistic living and toward interdependent living with other followers of Christ.*

- This is the imagery Paul is emphasizing when he urges us to present our bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice.
- It is important to remember that we are not urged to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice” in order to gain God's acceptance. Rather we are accepted because of Christ, and we are also put into God's permanent and pure family through our faith in Christ. This fundamental message is repeatedly emphasized and elaborated upon

throughout the NT. In fact, the next few verses in Romans 12 highlight the importance and reality of our corporate identity for spiritual growth:

- **Romans 12** -- ³For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. ⁴Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, ⁵in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

Principle #4: Cultivating joy in the privilege of sacrificial living is central to spiritual growth.

- Paul urges us to repeatedly choose to present ourselves as a living sacrifice in Romans 12:1. Why is it good for us to do this in an ongoing way? Simply put, a life of sacrificial generosity matches reality and our new identity in Christ.
- Notice why Paul urges the Corinthians to run from sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians.
 - **1 Cor. 6** -- ¹⁹Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.
- Also take note that this line of thinking is not unique to Paul.
 - **1 John 4** -- ¹⁹We love because He first loved us.
- Finally, observe that it is love (not duty or guilt or the applause of others) which compels Paul to live for Christ.
 - **2 Cor. 5** -- ¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If One died for all, then all died. ¹⁵And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.

Principle #5: In order to grow, we must partner with God in the lifelong project of transforming our thinking (our minds).

- ²"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."
 - The first four principles above summarize some of the major ways in which our thinking must be transformed to match God's views and values. If we do not intentionally pursue transformation, we will default to conformity with the views and values of the world's system.
- Elsewhere, Paul clarifies that how we think and what we value is the true battleground of the cosmic spiritual war.
 - **2 Cor. 10** -- ³For though we live in the body, we do not wage war in an unspiritual way, ⁴since the weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments ⁵and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to obey Christ.

What are some ways that our views and values can be transformed so we increasingly agree with God?

Study #7: Developing Disciples Who Embody the Character of Christ

How important do you think character is in the life of a disciple and disciplemaker?

Read: “Morality Makers” or “Made to be Moral”?

1 Tim. 3 -- This saying is trustworthy: “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work.” ² An overseer, therefore, must **be above reproach**, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an able teacher, ³ not addicted to wine, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy— ⁴ one who manages his own household competently, having his children under control with all dignity. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?)

The above passage refers to qualifications for overseers/elders in the church, but it also serves as a measuring stick for the maturing Christian regardless of his or her ministry role.

What characteristics describe a maturing disciple from the text above? Discuss with your discipler.

The principle at work in this text is that one must progress in faithfulness with “smaller” things (self, family, sporadic service and leadership opportunities, etc.) before being entrusted with “bigger” responsibilities (ongoing disciples, leadership within a HC, point leadership of HC, leading within a broader network, etc.).

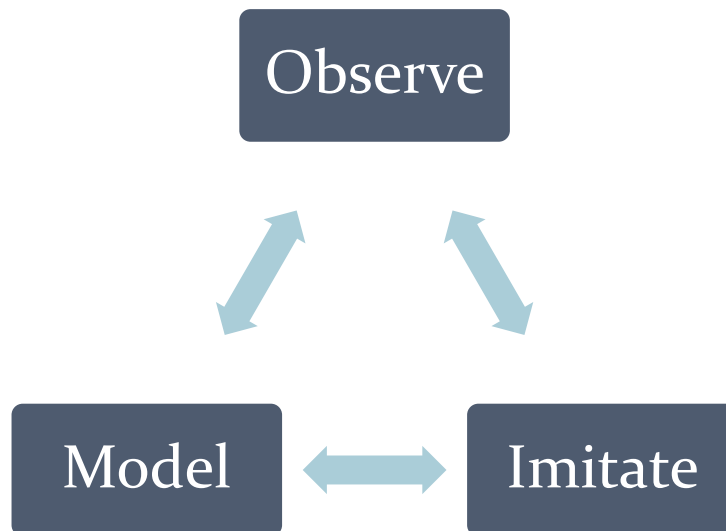
- The other important principle informing all of this is that faithfulness will initially and ultimately be measured by one’s character.
 - NOTE: It is crucial to remember that faithfulness and growth is measured in trajectory and progress, not in snapshots and perfection.

Why might it be important that we both place a high value on character, while also prioritizing progress not perfection?

Below are just a couple of the other passages that place a high priority on faithful character development. Read through them and discuss with your discipler:

1 Timothy 4 -- ¹⁵ Practice these things; be committed to them, so that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶ Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Thessalonians 1 -- ⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance. You know what kind of men we were among you for your benefit, ⁶ and you became imitators of us and of the Lord when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit. ⁷ As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ For the Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out.



Much of what we need to pass on to disciples is more caught than taught...

Counsel plays an important role in helping disciples progress through areas of pain, difficulty, sin, and unhealthy ways of relating to others.

- In biblical terms, “to counsel” means everything from putting courage into another to rebuking someone to quietly listening and offering a few words of solace and potentially direction.
- “In the early church, there were no professional counselors. People in the body of Christ helped each other as they were able. We believe this should still happen, especially with the ninety-plus percent of people’s problems that are not clinical.”

-Dennis McCallum & Jessica Lowery, *Organic Disciplemaking*, pg. 143-44.

What are some potential problems that could arise if the church merely relies upon professional therapists for personal counseling issues?

“We have produced a generation of therapists, an army of counselors trained to do battle with problems they poorly understand because they have spent more time in classrooms becoming experts than in God’s presence becoming elders. We have lost interest in developing mentors, wise men and women who know how to get to the real core of things and who have the power to bring supernatural resources to bear on what’s wrong.”

-Larry Crabb, *The Silence of Adam*, pg. 35

In the following studies we will focus on some vital areas of counseling that every disciple and discipler must prioritize.

Study #8: Counseling Focus: CONFLICT

The closer a group of people is, the more likely there is to be conflict. Conflict is not necessarily bad. If there is no conflict, it likely means:

- *People avoid talking about controversial issues*
- *People are so disengaged that they don't care enough to fight*
- *The group is in a short season of respite!*

Principles of mature conflict management

Much of the following content comes from or is influenced by Ken Sande's excellent book [*The Peacemaker*](#).

- Potential perspectives on conflict:
 - *A chance to prove that I am right.*
 - *A nuisance to be avoided at all costs.*
 - *Something that shouldn't happen among believers.*
 - *A stewardship responsibility from God!*

How might our approach to conflict change if we see it as a God-given stewardship?

"In conflict, we show that we either have a big God, or we have a big ego and big problems."
(Ken Sande)

- *Important to look at the conflict vertically and horizontally.*
- *In conflict, we need to present ourselves to God as His servants just as much as we need to when we are preparing to teach the Word.*

Ways we present ourselves to God in conflict:

- ***We need to "take the plank out of our own eye." (Matt. 7:5)***
 - Help disciples see where they may be in the wrong:
 - *Projecting hostility*
 - *Being insensitive*
 - *Failure to listen patiently*
 - *Adopting a punishing disposition*
 - *Unreasonable expectations*
 - *Other implications?*
- ***We need to understand & practice unilateral forgiveness***
 - **Ephesians 4** -- ³¹ All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. ³² And be kind and

compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

- **When you choose to forgive another:**
 - You are choosing to absorb the offense, rather than hold the offense over offender's head.
 - You are choosing to live God's way. We can only forgive because Christ forgave us (and He's already paid for this particular offense as well).
 - You are almost certainly not engaging in a one-time event. We must choose to forgive the person each time the offense comes to mind and starts to hold sway over our thoughts and feelings toward the person.
- ***If needed, we need to go and repent to our opponent; asking forgiveness for our moral failure in the conflict.***
 - This often breaks the negative back and forth rhythm, but the repentance must be legit & not...
 - *An attempt to just smooth the waters*
 - *An attempt to manipulate the opponent to confess*
 - *Filled with qualifications & subtle accusations*
- ***We might need to see that some things just need to be overlooked...***
 - **Proverbs 19:11** -- A person's insight gives him patience, and his virtue is to overlook an offense.
 - **Proverbs 12:16** -- A fool's displeasure is known at once, but whoever ignores an insult is sensible.
- ***Nevertheless, some issues are too important to overlook.***
 - Issues that harm the opponent, harm others, or harm the church fellowship...

For further study, see chapters 10 & 11 of *Organic Discipleship* and *The Peacemaker*.

Why might it be important to equip the church to wisely handle conflict?

Study #9: Counseling Focus: IMMORALITY

Goals:

- Help the disciple critique & resist the moral system of the *kosmos* (“world’s value system”)
 - **1 John 2** -- ¹⁵Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything that belongs to the world—***the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s lifestyle***—is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does God’s will remains forever.
- Help the disciple replace the *kosmos* with biblical morality

We ought to especially focus on major moral issues (which John seems to categorically outline in the passage above)

How might we determine the items that are major moral issues?

The NT writers seem to stay within John’s description of “everything that belongs to the world (*kosmos*)” when they address major sin:

General Major Category #1: Sexual Immorality (“lust of the flesh”)

1 Corinthians 6 -- ⁹Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: **No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or anyone practicing homosexuality**, ¹⁰no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom. ¹¹And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- In light of everything surrounding the phrase “idolaters,” it is highly likely that here Paul means people who are giving themselves over to worshipping pagan idols via sexual intercourse with ritual prostitutes
- Later in chapter 6, Paul reinforces and amplifies his warnings about sexual immorality (literally “porneia” which is the Greek term for all sex outside heterosexual marriage):
 - **1 Cor. 6** -- ¹⁸Run from sexual immorality! “Every sin a person can commit is outside the body.” On the contrary, the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. ¹⁹Don’t you know that your body is a sanctuary of the

Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.

- *Why does the Bible take such a strong stance against “porneia”?*
 - **Sexuality gets at the core of our humanity & sexual activity inevitably leads to a “oneness” with another person...** (see Genesis 2:22-25)
 - **Leads to intense feelings of shame...**
 - **Tends toward secrecy & the power of sin is greatly intensified in the dark**
- *Though “sin is sin”, in this passage Paul points out that sexual immorality is deeply damaging to one’s identity...*
 - Notice the rationale for resistance is that self-absorbed gratification is inconsistent with the new identity in Christ (the broader context also points out how sexual immorality impacts the fellowship)

Principles of counseling for those struggling with sexual immorality

- *Thoroughly study God’s design for sexuality*

Suggestions:

- Thoroughly study Genesis 2-3 (*design & curse*)
- Ch. 15 of *Spiritual Love* on “**Sexual Love or Exploitation**”

General Major Category #2: Greed (“the lust of the eyes”)

1 Corinthians 6 -- ⁹Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or anyone practicing homosexuality, ¹⁰**no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers** will inherit God’s kingdom. ¹¹And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- All of the bolded words have to do with wanting & getting more at any expense
 - Initially “verbally abusive” stands out as not fitting in with the other terms, but upon further examination the Greek word λοιδωρος (lidoros) has a root meaning connected to “striving” (see this [interesting article](#) for more)

Elsewhere, greed is singled out as the epitome of idolatry:

Colossians 3 -- ⁵Therefore, put to death what belongs to your worldly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.

- When you read the surrounding context in Colossians 3, the familiar pattern emerges. Namely, the call to turn away from sin because it is inconsistent with a believer’s new identity in Christ and new eternal home with God.

For other passages on the serious nature of greed and materialism see the following:

- Luke 12:13-21
- Luke 16:9-13

- James 5:1-6
- 1 Timothy 6:3-10,17-19

General Major Category #3: Status/Interpersonal Relating (“pride in one’s lifestyle”)

In addition to conflict, the following areas of major sin arise from a person having an insecure identity apart from Christ. We see the impact of identity confusion upon poor relating with others in Ephesians 4 (one among many passages that follow this line of thought):

Ephesians 4 -- ²²You took off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires; ²³you are being renewed in the spirit of your minds; ²⁴you put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth. ²⁵Since you put away lying, Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and don’t give the Devil an opportunity. ²⁸The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. ³⁰And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. ³¹All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. ³²And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

- In this passage and others like it (Colossians 3 for instance), notice the following sins toward others that arise because we take “pride in our lifestyle/defend our image”:
 - **Sins of Speech:**
 - **Gossip** – taking pride in what one knows and using it to build reputation
 - **Slander** – making false statements about others usually to build up self
 - **Lying** – failure to speak the truth in love (emphasized as a priority earlier in Eph. 4)
 - **Foul language** – in the context this does not refer to cussing, but rather refers to language that tears others down
 - **Sins of Action & Attitude:**
 - **Harboring anger and bitterness** – this is why we are called to not “let the sun go down on our anger”
 - **Taking advantage of others** – this is what it means to be a thief; a thief refuses to put in the work & instead feasts on the work of others
 - **NOTE:** The common sin of high-expectation relating actually relates to living as a thief. The person who expects another person to know all of his needs and meet all of his needs is typically taking but rarely (if ever) giving back to others.
 - **Grieving the Spirit** – in context this clearly refers to living and acting in a way that violates what the Spirit has done – namely, sealing us and placing us into the body where we are “members of one another”

General Major Category #4: Omission (“failing to do what one ought to do”)

James 4 -- ¹⁷ So it is a sin for the person who knows to do what is good and doesn't do it.

- Most Christians seem to build their moral and ethical views around things “we ought not to do.” Clearly, such a concern is not entirely bad based on our discussion above about damaging sins of commission. Nevertheless, few believers seem adequately uptight about sins of omission – failing to do the good we ought to do. The following are some of the major areas of ethical and moral omission for Christians:
 - Failure to pursue a life of personal ministry and discipling
 - Failure to take seriously all the “one another” commands in the NT
 - Failure to steward the resources God has entrusted to us (money, time, etc.)
 - Failure to show up and give of self to the fellowship
 - Failure to love perfectly from the heart (thus we desperately need God's grace!)

A common culprit behind a slew of sins of omission is Internet Technology (IT) overuse because it tends to deaden our spiritual/relational senses, while also feeding addictive & escapist behavior. Please read and discuss [this important appendix material](#) with your discipler.

Study #10: Developing Key Ministry Skills

Some general ideas as disciples get started in ministry...

Intentionally celebrate, encourage, & evaluate step that are taken, not matter how “small” they may seem:

- “I noticed you did _____. Good work!”
- “I was encouraged by what you said/prayed during the meeting.”
- “I heard _____ discussing your thought after the meeting. God used you to build others up!”
- “What was it like for you to serve in that way?”

Intentionally pray for & with your disciple for ministry

- Together ask God to help you see ministry as a gift
- Pray for specific opportunities for personal ministry
 - Evangelism
 - Encouragement of another
 - Opportunity to disciple
- Teach the disciple that God wants us to take the responsibility to partner with Him in building up personal ministry (Matt. 28:20)

What difference might it make if disciples partner with God to take responsibility for cultivating personal ministry?

Begin to systematically study key ministry components by together assessing how you are developing in each of the following areas.

Evangelism:

- Able to explain the Gospel
- Able to share own testimony of accepting Christ
- Able to offer sound evidence/credibility for Christ
- Learning how to dialogue & keep asking questions of seekers
- Convinced that God is at work pursuing everyone

Disciplemaking:

- Convinced (biblically) that all believers are called to this ministry
- Can explain goals & methods of disciplemaking
 - Four Quadrants of Growth
 - Spiritual multiplication
- Studying good resources to match areas of needed growth

Ministry of Follow-Up:

- *An intentional ministry in which a disciple pursues a newcomer for the purpose of:*
 - Helping them feel welcome
 - Establishing/continuing relationship
 - Inviting questions & dialogue about Christ/church
 - Helping the newcomer determine where they stand with God
 - Discerning next steps
 - Can turn into discipleship if the newcomer is ready
 - Can include investigating further evidence for Christ
 - Can include helping them see that a different church is a better fit for them (especially if there are rigid philosophy of ministry differences)

Follow-Up	Discipleship
Short-term commitment	Long-term commitment
Helping person commit to Christ/church	Already committed to Christ & our church (discipling in different churches is limited)
Typically issue(s)-focused	Ministry-focused (holistic training with goal of building personal discipling min.)
Loose expectations	Clear & shared expectations & commitments

***Both follow-up & discipleship are important, but you just need to be clear about the nature of the relationship & commitments for the sake of both parties.

Selecting who to disciple is incredibly important

What difference might it make if disciples partner with God to take responsibility for cultivating personal ministry?

Luke 6 -- ¹² During those days He went out to the mountain to pray and spent all night in prayer to God. ¹³ When daylight came, He summoned His disciples, and He **chose** 12 of them—He also named them apostles...

Acts 16 -- Then he went on to Derbe and Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was a Greek. ² The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke highly of him. ³ Paul wanted Timothy (**lit. “this one”**) to go with him, so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they traveled through the towns, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem for them to observe. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.

Why is selection so important?

- Discipleship is a huge, time-consuming, multi-year commitment
- In saying “yes” to one person, you are saying “no” to another potential disciple

- The multiplication capability of the HC is heavily dependent upon the quality of discipleship
- Jesus clearly modeled the importance of selection

What criteria should we use when selecting who to disciple?

Counterfeit Criteria	Biblical Criteria
Age (spiritual or biological)	Hunger for Word
Giftedness	Sharing Christ & Serving
Personality	Making time for growth
Personal affinity	Taking steps of faith
Secular Success	Authentic about failures
People-pleasing	Demonstrated DOER

Getting started in a discipleship relationship (once selection occurs):

- ***Clearly explain the purpose***
 - Share vision of what you have seen in him/her
 - Share a picture of a preferred future
- ***Clarify your expectations***
 - Make them few
 - Make them clear
 - Make honesty a priority
- ***Explain the Four Quadrants of Focus***
 - Together determine a first area of focus & plan of action

What potential issues could arise if discipleship purpose and expectations are not clearly communicated and understood?

Study #11: Developing Prayerfulness

Goal: *To develop disciples who habitually turn to God regardless of circumstances.*

Prayer really has to do with our foundational outlook on all of life and ministry. If we actually think we can control reality and/or change others, then we will pray very little. For this reason, this study will focus on our foundational outlook rather than dissect prayer techniques.

John 13 -- ³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. ³²If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself and will glorify Him at once.

- The foundational purpose of all creation is to “glorify God”
 - *Glorify* = “to make known, live in line with, & celebrate who God really is”

John 13 -- ³⁴“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. ³⁵**By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**”

- Our love for one another is a key way that we make God known (“glorify” him)
 - Individual & corporate prayer are key ways we build & demonstrate love for one another

John 14 -- ¹²“I assure you: The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³**Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.** ¹⁴**If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.**

- God is totally into answering prayers that align with his clearly revealed purposes of making himself known & making disciples
 - To ask “in God’s name” means to ask in a way that fits his character and purposes

John 15 -- ⁴Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is **unable to produce fruit by itself** unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. ⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because **you can do nothing without Me.** ⁷If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, **ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.** ⁸My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples.

- We can’t produce the eternal fruit God has in mind on our own, but we must proactively remain in Christ via cultivating a vibrant life in the Word, in prayer, & in outreach-minded fellowship with others.

John 15 -- ¹⁶You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you that you should go out and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. ¹⁷**This is what I command you: Love one another.**

Summary of The Foundational Perspective:

- We exist to glorify God (reveal who He really is; this is the “fruit” we are to produce)
- God is glorified as we love one another
- We won’t be able to produce this fruit unless we remain in Christ
- If we remain in Christ, we will increasingly want to glorify God
- God will answer our prayers because they fit with His goals/the purpose of our existence

Bogus Excuse: “But I am too busy to invest time in prayer.”

Luke 5 -- ¹⁵But the news about Him spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶Yet **He often withdrew to deserted places and prayed.**

- At the height of his popularity and extremely full schedule, Jesus OFTEN withdrew to pray because he had a clear grasp on the foundational perspective (he knew how reality works)

Some simple steps for growth in prayer:

1. Just start talking to God about what is on your mind
2. Let disciples know that you are praying for them
3. Let disciples know what you are praying for them
4. Pray with disciples!!!
5. Let God’s Word inform and guide your praying (make it interactive)
 - He speaks to us via His Word
 - We speak to Him via prayer
6. Plan to pray, because nobody will plan this for you!
 - **Mark 1** -- ³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He got up, went out, and made His way to a deserted place. And He was praying there. ³⁶Simon and his companions went searching for Him. ³⁷They found Him and said, “Everyone’s looking for You!”
 - **The noise of society pushes against prayerfulness, so prayer takes planning and the breaking of habits**
 - *For instance, immediately getting on our phone to check social media is a great distraction to prayer & tends to suck our minds immediately into the world’s value system to start the day.*
7. Study & help one another remember the reality of the spiritual war we are in
 - Read *Satan and His Kingdom* together
8. Other practical suggestions:
 - **Write out your prayers**
 - **Keep a prayer journal (with answers!)**
 - **Use prayer cards**
 - **Walk & Pray**
 - **Read an inspiring book on prayer**
 - Consider starting with *A Praying Life*

Study #12: *Developing a Loving Life*

Goal: *To develop humble, servant-hearted disciples who sacrificially love others*

1 Corinthians 13 -- If I speak human or angelic languages **but do not have love**, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains **but do not have love**, I am nothing. ³ And if I donate all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body in order to boast **but do not have love**, I gain nothing.

- Spiritual gifts, ministry skills, etc. all matter, but without loving others deeply from the heart they all end up empty & lifeless

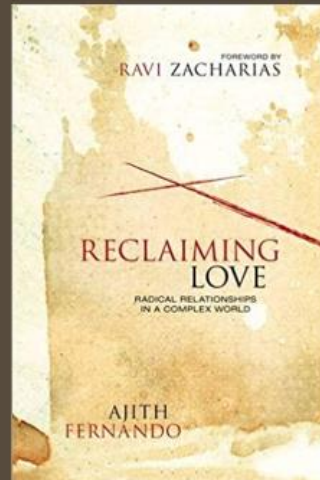
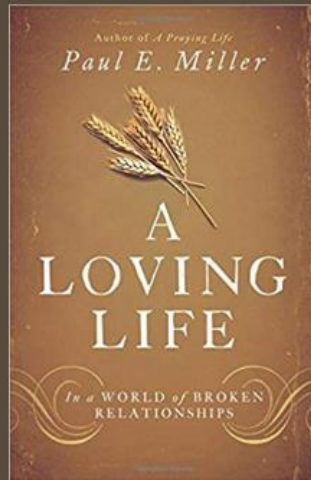
*Fundamentally, Christianity is **not** a religious system, or an intellectual worldview, or personalized spiritual therapy, or a conquering army, or a production factory...*

*Fundamentally, Christianity **is** a love relationship with Christ that compels us to love other people with Christ's love...*

HOW ARE WE DOING CULTIVATING A LOVING LIFE?			
+ R E C E I V I N G -	"Dead Sea" Christianity		A Loving Life
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual gluttony • Unmoved by "basic" truths • Fosters "heart disease" 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never over the gospel • Ministry is a gift from God • Interdependent living
	Narcissistic Christianity		Messiah Complex
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What am I getting out of this church?" • Paralysis by analysis 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity in your ministry • Vulnerable to burn-out • Prayer plays a minor role
-		GIVING	+

How would you assess your current level of cultivation of a loving life?

A COUPLE READING SUGGESTIONS...



Study #13: Persevering as Christ's Disciple

Some Background on 2 Corinthians (key book on the life of ministry):

- Paul planted the Corinthian church
- Paul spent a couple of years there investing in the church at great cost to himself
- Corinth was a worldly city in every sense
- Paul had already written them at least two other letters in order to teach and correct
- Many were turning on Paul because other leaders were around who were more appealing

2 Cor. 1 -- Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Timothy our brother: To God's church at Corinth, with all the saints who are throughout Achaia.

Ministry Meditation #1:

To survive & thrive in a life of ministry you must be convinced this is God's work among God's people...

2 Cor. 1 -- ³Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. ⁴He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵For as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so through Christ our comfort also overflows.

Ministry Meditation #2:

Gospel-driven affliction & suffering are normative in a life of ministry.

2 Timothy 3 -- ¹⁰But you have followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, and endurance, ¹¹**along with the persecutions and sufferings that came to me** in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from them all. ¹²In fact, all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Ministry Meditation #3:

How to endure & thrive in suffering is a key equipping point for those we disciple.

The many types of suffering we must endure in ministry:

- The loss of many conveniences & comforts
- Dealing with the disappointments of others
- Dealing with our disappointments in others
- Learning not to live for the applause of others
- Facing our own failures & sinfulness
- Numerous other experiences of fallen humanity & a broken world

2 Cor. 1 -- ⁹ Indeed, we personally had a death sentence within ourselves, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and He will deliver us. We have put our hope in Him that He will deliver us again ¹¹ while you join in helping us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gift that came to us through the prayers of many.

Ministry Meditation #4:

Going through regular & sustained difficulty for Christ has a way of exposing & extinguishing “self”...

2 Cor. 1 -- ¹² For this is our confidence: The testimony of our conscience is that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you, ***with God-given sincerity and purity, not by fleshly wisdom but by God’s grace.*** ¹³ Now we are writing nothing to you other than what you can read and also understand. I hope you will understand completely— ¹⁴ as you have partially understood us—that we are your reason for pride, as you are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

Ministry Meditation #5:

As we suffer with and for others, our motives and methods are refined and revealed...

2 Cor. 3 -- Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, recognized and read by everyone. ³ It is clear that you are Christ’s letter, produced by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God—not on stone tablets but ***on tablets that are hearts of flesh.***

Ministry Meditation #6:

Our ability to survive and thrive in ministry is connected to how much we allow God to carve others into our hearts...

2 Cor. 12 -- ⁶ For if I want to boast, I will not be a fool, because I will be telling the truth. But I will spare you, so that no one can credit me with something beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, ⁷ especially because of the extraordinary revelations. Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so I would not exalt myself. ⁸ Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away from me. ⁹ But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. ¹⁰ **So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, catastrophes, persecutions, and in pressures, because of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Ministry Meditation #7:

Our ability to survive and thrive in ministry depends upon how much we allow God to redefine our understanding of strength and weakness...

2 Cor. 4 -- ¹⁴We know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and present us with you. ¹⁵Indeed, everything is for your benefit, so that grace, extended through more and more people, may cause thanksgiving to increase to God's glory. ¹⁶Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. ¹⁸So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Ministry Meditation #8:

Our ability to survive and thrive in ministry depends upon how well we cultivate an eternal perspective...

Toward the end of his life, Paul offers us one subtle, but crucial insight into how to persevere in a life of ministry.

2 Tim. 4 -- ⁹Make every effort to come to me soon, ¹⁰for Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry.

Ministry Meditation #9:

Our ability to go the long-haul with Jesus will be intimately tied to how well we intentionally cultivate long-term Gospel-centered friendships...

In conclusion, take some time to reflect over the following highly intimate passage that Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi:

Philippians 1 -- ³I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, ⁴always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Appendix A:

DIAGNOSING ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

Some excerpts from ch. 1 of *Love Your God With All Your Mind* by J.P. Moreland
(NOTE: footnotes are connected to the original text & references can be found there)

“The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking.”

-Neil Postman in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

We are staring down the barrel of a loaded gun, and we can no longer afford to act like it's loaded with blanks. Recently, the guidance counselor at a local public high school near my home confessed to a parents' group that the teenagers that have attended the school during the last ten years are the most dysfunctional, illiterate group he has witnessed in close to forty years at the same school. Our society has replaced heroes with celebrities, the quest for a well-informed character with the search for a flat stomach, substance and depth with image and personality. In the political process, the makeup man is more important than the speech writer, and we approach the voting booth, not on the basis of a well-developed philosophy of what the state should be, but with a heart full of images, emotions, and slogans all packed into thirty-second sound bites. The mind-numbing, irrational tripe that fills TV talk shows is digested by millions of bored, lonely Americans hungry for that sort of stuff. What is going on here? What has happened to us?

The Loss of the Christian Mind in American Christianity

Two major developments emerged in the late nineteenth century that contributed to the loss of the Christian mind in America. The legacy of the Pilgrims and Puritans waned, and two new movements emerged from which the evangelical church has never fully recovered. Let's take a brief look at these two movements, and then we'll examine the deeper problems that have resulted.

Historical Overview

1. *The emergence of anti-intellectualism.* While generalizations can be misleading, it is safe to say that from the arrival of the Pilgrims to the middle of the nineteenth century, American believers prized the intellectual life for its contribution to the Christian journey. The Puritans were highly educated people (the literacy rate for men in early Massachusetts

and Connecticut was between 89 and 95 percent)⁴ who founded colleges, taught their children to read and write before the age of six, and studied art, science, philosophy, and other fields as a way of loving God with the mind. Scholars like Jonathan Edwards were activists who sought to be scholarly and well informed in a variety of disciplines. The minister was an intellectual, as well as spiritual authority in the community.⁵ As Puritan Cotton Mather proclaimed, “Ignorance is the Mother not of Devotion but of HERESY.”⁶

In the middle 1800s, however, things began to change dramatically,

Though the seeds for the change had already been planted in the popularized, rhetorically powerful, and emotionally directed preaching of George Whitefield in the First Great Awakening in the United States from the 1730s to the 1750s. During the middle 1800s, three awakenings broke out in the United States: the Second Great Awakening (1800-1820), the revivals of Charles Finney (1824-1837), and the Layman's Prayer Revival (1856-1858). Much good came from these movements. But their overall effect was to overemphasize immediate personal conversion to Christ instead of a studied period of reflection and conviction; emotional, simple, popular preaching instead of intellectually careful and doctrinally precise sermons; and personal feelings and relationship to Christ instead of a deep grasp of the nature of Christian teaching and ideas. Sadly, as historian George Marsden notes, “anti-intellectualism was a feature of American revivalism.”⁷

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with the emphasis of these movements on personal conversion. What was a problem, however, was the intellectually shallow, theologically illiterate form of Christianity that came to be part of the populist Christian religion that emerged. One tragic result of this was what happened in the so-called Burned Over District in the state of New York. Thousands of people were “converted” to Christ by revivalist preaching, but they had no real intellectual grasp of Christian teaching. As a result, two of the three major American cults began in the Burned Over District among the unstable, untaught “converts”: Mormonism (1830) and the Jehovah's Witnesses (1884). Christian Science arose in 1866 but was not connected with this area.

2. *Evangelical withdrawal began.* Sadly, the emerging anti-intellectualism in the church created a lack of readiness for the widespread intellectual assault on Christianity that reached full force in the late 1800s. This attack was part of the war of ideas raging at that time and was launched from three major areas. First, certain *philosophical ideas* from Europe, especially the views of David Hume (1711-1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), altered people's understanding of religion. Hume claimed that the traditional arguments for God's existence (for example, the world is an effect that needs a personal cause) were quite weak. He also said that since we cannot experience God with the five senses, the claim that God exists cannot be taken as an item of knowledge. In a different way, Kant asserted that human knowledge is limited to what can be experienced with the five senses, and since God cannot be so experienced, we cannot know He exists. The ideas of Hume and Kant had a major impact on culture as they spread across Europe and into America.⁸

For one thing, confidence was shaken in arguments for the existence of God and the rationality of the Christian faith. Additionally, fewer and fewer people regarded the Bible as a body of divinely revealed, true propositions about various topics that requires a devoted intellect to grasp and study systematically. Instead, the Bible increasingly was sought solely as a practical guide for ethical guidance and spiritual growth.

Second, *German higher criticism* of the Bible called its historical reliability into question. The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was challenged and the search for the historical Jesus was launched. Believers grew suspicious of the importance of historical study in understanding the Bible and in defending its truthfulness. An increased emphasis was placed on the Holy Spirit in understanding the Bible as opposed to serious historical and grammatical study. Third, *Darwinian evolution* emerged and “made the world safe for atheists,” as one contemporary Darwinian atheist has put it. Evolution challenged the early chapters of Genesis for some and the very existence of God for others.⁹

Instead of responding to these attacks with a vigorous intellectual counterpunch, many believers grew suspicious of intellectual issues altogether. To be sure, Christians must rely on the Holy Spirit in their intellectual pursuits, but this does not mean they should expend no mental sweat of their own in defending the faith.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, fundamentalists withdrew from the broader intellectual culture and from the war with liberals that emerged in most mainline denominations at the time. Fundamentalists started their own Bible institutes and concentrated their efforts on lay-oriented Bible and prophecy conferences. This withdrawal from the broader, intellectual culture and public discourse contributed to the isolation of the church, the marginalization of Christian ideas from the public arena, and the shallowness and trivialization of Christian living, thought, and activism. In short, the culture became saltless.

More specifically, we now live in an evangelical community so deeply committed to a certain way of seeing the Christian faith that this perspective is now imbedded within us at a subconscious level. This conceptualization of the Christian life is seldom brought to conscious awareness for debate and discussion. And our modern understanding of Christian practice underlies everything else we do, from the way we select a minister to the types of books we sell in our bookstores. It informs the way we raise our children to think about Christianity; it determines how we give money to the cause of Christ; and it shapes our vision, priorities, and goals for both local and parachurch ministry. If our lives and ministries are expressions of what we actually believe, and if what we believe is off center and yet so pervasive that it is seldom even brought to conscious discussion, much less debated, then this explains why our impact on the world is so paltry compared to our numbers. I cannot overemphasize the fact that this modern understanding of Christianity is neither biblical nor consistent with the bulk of church history.

What, exactly, is this modern understanding of Christianity?

Anti-intellectualism's Impact on the Church

I believe it is critical that the evangelical church overcome these characteristics and move toward a clearer, more biblical understanding of the Christian mind and how Christ Himself wants to shape our thinking. The rest of this book will attempt to provide countermeasures to these unbiblical problems so that our spirituality is informed by an appropriate biblical view of the mind and how Jesus Himself wishes to transform the mind by renewing it (in fact, we'll look at Romans 12:1-2 in some depth later). Five characteristics capture the essence of the impact of anti-intellectualism on today's evangelicalism. Read carefully and see how these may have impacted your own ideas.

1. *A misunderstanding of faith's relationship to reason.* First, while few would actually put it in these terms, faith is now understood as a blind act of will, a decision to believe something that is either independent of reason or that is a simple choice to believe while ignoring the paltry lack of evidence for what is believed. By contrast with this modern misunderstanding, biblically, *faith is a power or skill to act in accordance with the nature of the kingdom of God*, a trust in what we have reason to believe is true. Understood in this way, we see that faith is built on reason. We should have good reasons for thinking that Christianity is true before we dedicate ourselves completely to it. We should have solid evidence that our understanding of a biblical passage is correct before we go on to apply it and so on.

If this is correct, then sermons should target people's thinking as much as their wills and feelings. Sunday school should be more effective in training believers how to think carefully about their faith. Training in apologetics should be a regular part of discipleship. Apologetics is a New Testament ministry of helping people overcome intellectual obstacles that block them from coming to or growing in the faith by giving reasons for why one should believe Christianity is true and by responding to objections raised against it. Local church after local church should be raising up and training a group of people who serve as apologists for the entire congregation.

Unfortunately, our contemporary understanding of these important concepts treats faith and reason as polar opposites. Let me give you two illustrations from my own ministry.

A few years ago I conducted a series of evangelistic messages for a church in New York. The series was in a high school gym, and both believers and unbelievers attended each night. The first evening I gave arguments for the existence of God from science and philosophy. Before closing in prayer, I entertained several questions from the audience. One woman (who was a Christian) complained about my talk, charging that if I "proved" the existence of God, I would leave no room for faith. I responded by saying that if she were right, then we should pray that currently available evidence for God would evaporate and be refuted so

there would be even more room for faith! Obviously, her view of faith utterly detached itself from reason.

The second illustration comes from repeatedly hearing small group Bible studies go straight to the question, What does this passage mean to me? while bypassing the prior question. What does the passage say and why do I think my interpretation is correct?¹⁰ We allow one another to get away with applying an understanding of a passage that is based on vague feelings or first impressions and not on the hard work of reading commentaries and using study tools such as concordances, Bible dictionaries, and the like. Why? Because a careful exercise of reason is not important in understanding what the Bible says for many of us. Besides, it takes work!

For many, religion is identified with subjective feelings, sincere motives, personal piety, and blind faith. As the song puts it, “You ask me how I know He lives. He lives within my heart.” In other words, we test the truth of our religion not by a careful application of our God-given faculties of thought, or even by biblical mandates (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 10:5), but rather by our private experiences. For the most part, theoretical reason is just not part of our local church life any longer. We often hear it said in church that we don't want a discussion to get too theological, we want to keep it practical, as though good practice did not require careful thought to direct it. We sing, “In my *heart*. Lord, be glorified,” but when was the last time you heard someone sing, “In my *intellectual life*. Lord, be glorified”? Unfortunately, this misunderstanding of the relationship between faith and reason has led to an even more sinister trend among modern evangelicals.

2. *The separation of the secular and the sacred.* There has emerged a secular/sacred separation in our understanding of the Christian life with the result that Christian teaching and practice are privatized and placed in a separate compartment from the public or so-called secular activities of life. The withdrawal of the corporate body of Christ from the public sphere of ideas is mirrored by our understanding of what is required to produce an individual disciple. Religion has become personal, private, and too often, simply a matter of “how I feel about things.”

By contrast, the culture encourages me to invoke my intellect in my secular, public life. By way of example, I'm always encouraged to use my intellect in how I approach my vocation, select a house, or learn to use a computer. But within the sphere of my private, spiritual life of faith, it is my heart, and my heart alone, that operates. The life of the mind is thus separated, broken off, and compartmentalized as a function of the “secular” life instead of more naturally being integrated with the spiritual. As a result, Sunday school classes, discipleship materials, and sermons too often address the heart and not the head, or focus on personal growth and piety and not on cultivating an intellectual love for God in my vocation.

When was the last time your church had Sunday school classes that were divided up by vocations—classes for thinking Christianly as a lawyer, businessman, health care

professional, educator, and so forth? parachurch ministries have produced excellent tools for training the private, “spiritual” lives of converts. But where are the tools that take ten or fifteen different university majors and spell out issues and resources for integrating ideas in those majors with Christian theology? We have organizations for businessmen that emphasize personal testimonies, devotional reading, and the like. But where do these organizations train businessmen to develop a Christian understanding of economic theory, capitalism, business ethics, or moral issues in the employer/employee relationship?

Our children can attend virtually any university and major in any subject they wish. But in a four-year course of study they will almost never interact with a Christian thinker in their field or with Christian ideas relevant to their course content. Why? No doubt, many reasons could be given. But clearly, one reason is that the cream rises to the top. If there are few Christian intellectuals who write college textbooks from a Christian perspective, it must be because our evangelical culture is simply not producing such people because we do not value the intellectual life.

After all, the purpose of college for many is to get a job, and course work is considered secular, not sacred. What is important for our children is that they stay pure in college and, perhaps, witness, have a quiet time, and pray regularly. Obviously, these are important. But for a disciple, the purpose of college is not just to get a job. Rather, it is to discover a vocation, to identify a field of study in and through which I can serve Christ as my Lord. And one way to serve Him in this way is to learn to think in a Christian manner about my major. A person's Christianity doesn't begin at a dorm Bible study, when class is over; it permeates all of one's life, including how one thinks about the ideas in one's college major.

The church must train high school students for the intellectual life they will encounter at college. As theologian Carl Henry put it, "Training the mind is an essential responsibility of the home, the church, and the school. Unless evangelicals prod young people to disciplined thinking, they waste—even undermine one of Christianity's most precious resources."¹¹

But if faith and reason are polar opposites, and if discipleship is private and sacred but college studies are public and secular, then training the intellect will not be valued as a part of teenage mentoring. That is why our discipleship materials often leave Christian young people vulnerable to atheistic college professors with an ax to grind. For such professors, shredding an intellectually unprepared undergraduate's faith is like shooting fish in a barrel.

We have seen that the church was attacked intellectually in the latter half of the nineteenth century and was not adequately prepared to respond to this attack in kind. Instead, with notable exceptions, the church withdrew from the world of ideas and the intellectual life and was thereby marginalized. As former president of the United Nations General Assembly, Charles Malik has said, “I must be frank with you: the greatest danger confronting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. The mind in its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough.”¹² This withdrawal and marginalization of the church has had devastating consequences for our attempt to produce

vibrant, confident disciples and to penetrate our culture with a Christian worldview and the gospel of Christ. These consequences are most evident in three more areas.

3. *Weakened world missions.* One critical consequence of our first two anti-intellectual trends is the combined effect of weakening world missions. I once attended a meeting of missionaries from around the world, at which a national Christian leader from Central America stood up and passionately exhorted North American mission agencies to stop sending evangelists to his country because their efforts were producing Marxists bent on overthrowing the government. You could have heard a pin drop in that meeting, and confusion was written on everyone's face.

This leader went on to explain that the leading “Christian” thinkers in his country held to liberation theology, a form of Marxism draped in religious garb. Evangelical missionaries would lead people to Christ, but the liberals were attracting the thinking leaders among the converts and training them in Marxist ideology, which these liberals identified as the true center of biblical theology. The leader pleaded with North Americans to send more theologians and Bible teachers and to help set up more seminaries and training centers in his country because the need for intellectual leadership was great. (And you wondered where the Sandinistas came from!)

For some time, theological liberals have understood that whoever controls the thinking leadership of the church in a culture will eventually control the church itself. Recently, I met a man from Fiji who was won to Christ by an evangelical missionary and who, subsequent to conversion, wanted to come to the United States for seminary training. Unfortunately, there was no money for this sort of “intellectual” development in the evangelical missions strategy there, but theological liberals gave him a scholarship to study at a liberal seminary in Texas. By the time I met him, he had given up his faith and was going back to Fiji with an extremely secular view of Christianity. His mission: to pastor a church! If evangelicals placed more value on the mind, we would give more to developing intellectual leadership around the world. Happily, some good things are now being done in this area, but we need to intensify our efforts in this regard, and this will happen only if we evangelicals come to value more fully Christ's admonitions to be good stewards of the intellectual life. Unfortunately, there remain two more deadly trends that have infected the church because of anti-intellectualism.

4. *Anti-intellectualism has spawned an irrelevant gospel.* Today, we share the gospel primarily as a means of addressing felt needs. We give testimonies of changed lives and say to people that if they want to become better parents or overcome depression or loneliness, then Christ is the answer for them. As true as this may be, such an approach to evangelism is inadequate for two reasons. First, it does not reach people who may be out of touch with their feelings. Consequently, if men in our culture are in general less in touch with their feelings than women, this approach will not reach men effectively. Second, it invites the response, “Sorry, but I don't have a need.” Have you ever wondered why no one responded to the apostle Paul in this manner? If you look at his evangelistic approach in Acts 17-20, the

answer becomes obvious. He based his preaching on the fact that the gospel is true and reasonable to believe. He reasoned with and tried to persuade people intelligently to accept Christ.

Now, if the gospel is true and reasonable to believe, then it is obvious that every person has a need for Christ's forgiveness and power, whether or not that person "feels" that need. The only response to the Pauline evangelistic approach is either to accept Christ or deny the truth of the gospel. The person approached is not let off the hook simply because he is out of touch with his feelings or doesn't recognize the "felt need." The fact that many respond to our evangelistic efforts by denying a need for Christ should tip us off to an important fact. If truth and reasonableness are not uppermost in our presentation of the gospel to a pagan culture already predisposed to regarding religion as a set of private feelings, then we'll consistently hear this response: "Well, that's fine for you if having those feelings helps you." Religion is now viewed by many as a placebo or emotional crutch precisely because that is how we often pitch the gospel to unbelievers.

I wish I could stop here. But again, there's another trend in evangelicalism that we must place at the feet of anti-intellectualism.

5. *A loss of boldness in confronting the idea structures in our culture with effective Christian witness.* Now this is a mouthful, but anti-intellectualism has drained the church of its boldness in witnessing and speaking out about important issues in the places where ideas are generated. And for those who do have such courage, anti-intellectualism has created a context in which we Christians often come off as shallow, defensive, and reactionary, instead of thoughtful, confident, and articulate.

One evening a couple came to our home for dinner. During the meal the husband said almost nothing (except "Pass the chicken!"). Despite repeated attempts to engage him, the conversation took place primarily among the two wives and me. However, as dessert was being served, the topic of conversation turned to motorboats, and from that point on we could hardly get a word in edgewise. Why? Boats were the man's hobby. He owned two of them, knew how to build one from scratch, and truly was an expert on the subject. He had courage to speak up because he knew what he was talking about; he did not need to be defensive when someone differed with his viewpoint because he was confident about his knowledge.

I have trained people to share their faith for over twenty-six years. I can tell you from experience that when people learn what they believe and why, they become bold in their witness and attractive in the way they engage others in debate or dialogue.

While pastoring a church in Baltimore, I once taught a twelve-week class on Christian apologetics. The course cost fifty dollars to take, required two textbooks, and had several homework assignments, including two papers. When the sixth week ended, a man named Bob came up to me after class and, with tears running down his cheeks, expressed his

gratitude for the high academic standards and requirements in the class. I asked him why he was grateful about this. I will never forget his response. He told me he had worked at the same place for ten years but had never shared his faith with anyone because he was afraid someone would ask him a question, he would not know the answer, and his inadequate preparation would embarrass him and the Christian faith. But at his workplace the week before this particular class, he had shared his faith with three workers because for the first time he felt he had some answers, and his boldness was strengthened by that conviction. Being a Christian is no different from caring about boats in this regard. There is nothing magic about being confident, articulate, and bold in either area. Knowing what you're talking about may be hard work, but it clearly pays off.

Anti-intellectualism has not merely impacted the lives of believers within the bosom of Christ. It has had serious repercussions in the culture at large. As anti-intellectualism has softened our impact for Christ, so too has it contributed to the secularization of the culture. If the salt loses its saltiness, the meat will be impacted. In the aftermath of the Scopes trial in 1925, conservative Christianity was largely dismissed as an embarrassment among intellectual and cultural movers and shakers.¹³ As a result, we now live in one of the most secular cultures in history.

The Emergence of a Secular Culture in Which the Church is Called to Live and Minister

Culture Is Secular

Modern American culture is largely secular in this sense: most people have little or no understanding of a Christian way of seeing the world, nor is a Christian worldview an important participant in the way we as a society frame and debate issues in the public square. Three of the major centers of influence in our culture—the university, the media, and the government—are largely devoid of serious religious discussion. In fact, it is not unfair to say that university, media, and governmental leaders are often illiterate about how Christians see the world and why. This is evident, for example, in those rare cases when the major television news media try to feature a Christian perspective on abortion, the state, or anything else. Usually, Christians watching the program feel misrepresented and misunderstood. More often than not, however, Christian perspectives are simply ignored and not covered at all.

If a Martian were watching television before coming to earth, he would get the idea that Americans are irreligious. Secularists tolerate religion as long as it remains a privatized perspective relative to a subgroup in society and as long as Christians don't assert that their views are objectively true and defend them articulately. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley have accurately captured this secular attitude toward Christianity:

The church is safe from vicious persecution at the hands of the secularist, as educated people have finished with stake-burning circuses and torture racks. No martyr's blood is

shed in the secular west. So long as the church knows her place and remains quietly at peace on her modern reservation. Let the babes pray and sing and read their Bibles, continuing steadfastly in their intellectual retardation; the church's extinction will not come by sword or pillory, but by the quiet death of irrelevance. But let the church step off the reservation, let her penetrate once more the culture of the day and the ... face of secularism will change from a benign smile to a savage snarl.¹⁴

Secularism Is Primarily a View About Knowledge

The primary characteristic of modern secularism is its view of the nature and limits of knowledge. It is critical to understand this because if knowledge gives one power—we give surgeons and not carpenters the right to cut us open precisely because surgeons have the relevant knowledge not possessed by carpenters—then those with the cultural say-so about who does and doesn't have knowledge will be in a position to marginalize and silence groups judged to have mere belief and private opinion.

For many secularists, knowledge is obtained solely by means of the senses and science. Something is true and reasonable to believe to the degree that it can be tested by the five senses—it can be seen, heard, touched, tasted, or felt. Seeing is believing. Likewise, knowledge is identical to *scientific* knowledge. If you can prove something scientifically, then it is culturally permissible or even obligatory to believe it. Science is the measure of all things, and when a scientist speaks about something, he or she speaks *ex cathedra*. For example, if theological arguments imply homosexuality is in some sense a choice over which one is responsible, and science makes a “claim” to the contrary, which one will win in public debate? We often hear it said that “if your religious beliefs work for you, that's great, but don't impose them on others.” However, no one would say that a scientist is imposing anything on anyone when he says that water is H₂O or that 2+2=4. Nor would these claims be viewed as private opinions whose sole value was their usefulness for those who believe them. Why? Because only science supposedly deals with facts, truth, and reason, but religion and ethics allegedly deal with private, subjective opinions.

I have no bone to pick with legitimate science. Indeed, it has been argued repeatedly that science was born in Christian Europe precisely because Christian theology helped provide worldview justification for its assumptions.¹⁵ *What I do reject is the idea that science and science alone can claim to give us knowledge.* This assertion—known as scientism—is patently false and, in fact, not even a claim of science, but rather, a philosophical view about science. Nevertheless, once this view of knowledge was widely embraced in the culture, the immediate effect was to marginalize and privatize religion by relegating it to the back of the intellectual bus.¹⁶ To verify this, one need only compare the number of times scientists, as opposed to pastors or theologians, are called upon as experts on the evening news.

If knowledge and reason are identical with what can be tested scientifically or with scientific theories that a majority of scientists believes to be correct, then religion and ethics will no longer be viewed as true, rational domains of discourse because, supposedly, religious or

ethical claims are not scientifically testable. This line of thought has led to several trends in society whose combined influence is to hinder ideal human flourishing as God intended it to be. It is similar to the sort of cultural milieu that spawned Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Nazism in pre-World War II Germany, with all of their attendant evils and tragic loss of human life and dignity. As G. K. Chesterton once bemoaned, once people stop believing in God, the problem is not that they will believe nothing; rather, the problem is that they will believe anything. This is just what we are seeing happen in our secular culture bereft of the presence of an engaged, articulate evangelical community.

Secular Views of Knowledge Are Responsible for Unfortunate Social Trends

Scientism is responsible for a number of unfortunate contemporary trends in society.

1. *In our scientifically oriented culture, traditional understandings of morality and related notions are considered passé.* The primary trend in ethical thinking today is toward *moral* and *religious relativism*. As I have already said, if ethics and religion are not scientifically testable, then many today will think they are mere “expressions of belief” that are true only for those who believe them. Science claims to deal only with fact; religion and ethics supposedly deal with feelings and privatized values. Therefore, religion and ethics are considered merely subjective notions in modern society.

Another modern trend is a change in what we mean by the *good life*. From Old Testament times and ancient Greece until this century, the good life was widely understood to mean a life of intellectual and moral virtue. The good life is the life of ideal human functioning according to the nature that God Himself gave to us. According to this view, prior to creation God had in mind an ideal blueprint of human nature from which He created each and every human being. Happiness (Greek: *eudaimonia*) was understood as a life of virtue, and the successful person was one who knew how to live life well according to what we are by nature due to the creative design of God. When the Declaration of Independence says we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them the right to pursue happiness, it is referring to virtue and character.¹⁷ So understood, happiness involves suffering, endurance, and patience because these are important means to becoming a good person who lives the good life.

Freedom was traditionally understood as the power to do what one ought to do. For example, some people are not free to play the piano or to say no to lust because they have not undergone the training necessary to ingrain the relevant skillful habits. Moreover, since community is possible only if people accept as true a shared vision of the good life, it is easy to see why a sense of community and public virtue could be sustained given this understanding of the good life, happiness, and freedom.

Traditionally, *tolerance* of other viewpoints meant that even though I think those viewpoints are dead wrong and will argue against them fervently, nevertheless, I will defend your right to argue your own case. Just as importantly, I will treat you with respect as an

image bearer of God, even though your views are abhorrent to me. Finally, while *individual rights* are important, they do not exhaust the moral life because virtue and duty are more central than rights to the moral life properly conceived.

2. *The traditional view is neither scientifically testable nor easily compatible with evolution.* Unfortunately, this traditional understanding of the good life, freedom, community, and tolerance is not scientifically testable. Moreover, Darwin's theory of evolution caused many to lose their belief in the *existence* of natures, human or otherwise. As Harvard zoologist Ernst Mayr has said:

The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every *eidos* (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.¹⁸

This belief has, in turn, led evolutionary thinkers like David Hull to make the following observation:

The implications of moving species from the metaphysical category that can appropriately be characterized in terms of “natures” to a category for which such characterizations are inappropriate are extensive and fundamental. If species evolve in anything like the way that Darwin thought they did, then they cannot possibly have the sort of natures that traditional philosophers claimed they did. If species in general lack natures, then so does *Homo sapiens* as a biological species. If *Homo sapiens* lacks a nature, then no reference to biology can be made to support one's claims about “human nature.” Perhaps all people are “persons,” share the same “person-hood,” etc., but such claims must be explicated and defended *with no reference to biology*. Because so many moral, ethical, and political theories depend on some notion or other of human nature, Darwin's theory brought into question all these theories. The implications are not entailments. One can always dissociate “*Homo sapiens*” from “*human being*,” but the result is a much less plausible position.¹⁹

Note Hull's comment that if a person or group dissociates the species-specific designation “*Homo sapiens*” from the designation “*human being*,” with all of its attendant moral and theological implications (a “being” might presuppose a creator), then that person or group has a “less plausible position.” Why? Why should that which we see, hear, feel, taste, or touch (or observe through scientific method) have sway over any cultural debate, since Hull's entire conclusion rests on the giant “if—”if species evolve in anything like the way Darwin thought they did...”? Yet, as we'll see in the next section, we have allowed secular thinkers to frame the debate, and the Christian voice has been muffled at best.

3. *Secular ideas have replaced the traditional view.* What Mayr and Hull are saying is that if naturalistic evolution is the story of how we came to be, then there is no human nature answering to a divine blueprint and no good life that expresses that nature. There are only accidentally formed individual human beings who are free to create whatever version of

happiness they wish. According to the modern view, the good life is the satisfaction of any pleasure or desire that someone freely and autonomously chooses for himself or herself. The successful person is the individual who has a life of pleasure and can obtain enough consumer goods to satisfy his or her desires. Freedom is the right to do what I want, not the power to do what I by nature ought to. Community gives way to individualism with the result that narcissism—an inordinate sense of self-love and self-centered involvement—is an accurate description of many people's lives. If I am free to create my own moral universe and version of the good life, and there is no right or wrong answer to what I should create, then morality—indeed, everything—ultimately exists to make me happy. When a person considers abortion or physician-assisted suicide, the person's individual rights are all that matter. Questions about virtue or one's duty to the broader community simply do not arise.

Tolerance has come to mean that no one is right and no one is wrong and, indeed, the very act of stating that someone else's views are immoral or incorrect is now taken to be intolerant (of course, from this same point of view, it is all right to be intolerant of those who hold to objectively true moral or religious positions). Once the existence of knowable truth in religion and ethics is denied, authority (the right to be believed and obeyed) gives way to power (the ability to force compliance), reason gives way to rhetoric, the speech writer is replaced by the makeup man, and spirited but civil debate in the culture wars is replaced by politically correct special-interest groups who have nothing left but political coercion to enforce their views on others. While the Christian faith clearly teaches that believers are to be involved as good citizens in the state, nevertheless, it is obvious why so many secularists are addicted to politics today because political power is a surrogate for a Higher Power. As Friedrich Nietzsche said, once God died in Western culture—that is, once the concept of God no longer informed the major idea-generating centers of society turned secular—there would be turmoil and horrible secular wars unchecked by traditional morality because the state would come to be a surrogate god for many.

Finally, individual rights have come to dominate our public discussion of moral issues. The public square—those aspects of society where all citizens must interface regardless of personal views; for example, public schools, and government—has become naked: religious, moral, and political debate therein is no longer informed by a clear, robust vision of the moral life shared by most citizens and taken to be true and rational. Once objective duty, goodness, and virtue were abandoned under the guise of scientism and secularism, the only moral map that could replace objective morality is what Daniel Callahan has called minimalist ethics—anything whatever is morally permissible provided only that you do not harm someone else.²⁰

Individual rights are important, and, for the Christian, they are grounded in the image of God and not in the state. In other words, the Christian believes that human rights are derived from the image of God in us; they do not ultimately come from the state. But there are more fundamental questions of virtue and duty that are relevant to the overall development of a moral outlook. For example, the abortion debate should not be framed

primarily as a debate about the right to life versus the right to choice. Basically, it should be discussed in terms of this question: What does a woman or a community committed to moral virtue and duty do when faced with the question of abortion? The tenor of the debate changes drastically when issues of virtue and duty to others is brought to the foreground and rights are relegated to a secondary position in the moral context

Until Christians can do a better job of seeing these issues and articulating them in terms of objective duty and virtue, the Jack Kevorkians will continue to win the “debate” (if that is what we should call the media rhetoric that surrounds the framing of moral dilemmas), precisely because the Kevorkians are on the side of individual rights. If the only morally relevant question to ask a patient is whether or not he freely and competently chooses physician-assisted suicide, then we are left with no moral categories in which to introduce more basic questions of duty and virtue. And this is where our secular society is at present, given its commitment to scientism that emerged in no small measure because a marginalized and inarticulate church withdrew into privatized religion as she welcomed the Trojan horse of anti-intellectualism within her walls.

What Should I Do to Live for Christ in This Hour of Crisis?

If you are like I am, your heart may be saddened by what you have read in this chapter. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must ask how we can become the kind of people we need to be to bring honor to Christ, to help turn the culture toward Him, and to be lights in the midst of darkness for our families, friends, churches, and communities. There is no simple answer to this question, but one thing is crystal clear. We must rededicate ourselves to being deeply spiritual people of whom it can truly be said that “Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). And, given the times in which we live, we must also obey Jesus’ admonition to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16, kjv). Surrounded by a fragmented culture, how do we become deeply spiritual people who are wise and savvy, yet innocent and pure? How do we raise children, develop good marriages, serve as role models at work, and make an attractive impact on our communities?

More than ever before, we need what the Old Testament calls wisdom. In later chapters we’ll talk more about the biblical view of wisdom, but for now I want to make something very clear. The spiritually mature person is a wise person. And a wise person has the savvy and skill necessary to lead an exemplary life and to address the issues of the day in a responsible, attractive way that brings honor to God. As we will see throughout this book, wisdom is the fruit of a life of study and a developed mind. Wisdom is the application of knowledge gained from studying both God’s written Word and His revealed truth in creation. *If we are going to be wise, spiritual people prepared to meet the crises of our age, we must be a studying, learning community that values the life of the mind.* The rest of this book develops the case for why this is so and presents resources for making it a reality in your own sojourn and in the life of your church. Clearly, to become spiritually formed in Christ, a person of wisdom, requires that we follow Christ’s teaching in this critical area—and it was He who taught us to love the Lord our God with all our minds.

Summary

In closing, I want to repeat that I am neither adequate for, nor do I have space to conduct, a full analysis of what has happened to the culture and the church. Obviously, more is going on here than a changed perspective of the intellectual life. But we as Christians must face the main fact of this chapter, to wit: Due to certain forces in the 1800s, conservative American Christianity responded to intellectual attack by withdrawing from public discourse and developing an anti-intellectual view of the Christian faith. This response created both a marginalized church with a softened impact for Christ and a secular culture.

English professor Carolyn Kane wrote an article in *Newsweek* about the loss of thinking in American culture generally. After putting her finger squarely on the problem, Kane identified her solution in front of both God and the *Newsweek* readership: “But how can we revive interest in the art of thinking? The best place to start would be in homes and churches of our land.”²¹ It is striking that she did not appeal to government, or for more money for public schools or better college facilities. Instead, she identified the church as the key factor. Perhaps Kane has a better grasp of the importance of the intellectual life in the Christian faith than many of us do. Perhaps she has read enough Scripture to know that the church was meant to be and has often been the instrument of reason in society. In the next chapter, we will see what Scripture tells us about the role of reason in the Christian life.

[RETURN TO STUDY #4](#)

Appendix B:

“Morality Makers” or “Made to be Moral”?

by Todd Stewart

INTRODUCTION

In the last few hundred years, enlightenment rationalists⁴ waged an increasingly hostile war against traditional moralists⁵ in the western world. Initially, enlightenment rationalists relied upon guerilla warfare tactics and avoided a frontal assault upon the larger, entrenched forces of traditional morality. Eventually, enlightenment rationalists gained enough power and credibility that the positions on the field of battle flipped — traditional moralists found themselves on the defensive against the overwhelming forces of their “enemy.”⁶ However, the twentieth-century demonstrated that humanism fared far better when attacking theism than it did in attempting to build a good and unified society. Two catastrophically destructive world wars and countless other atrocities painfully exposed the humanistic assumption that society would inevitably continue to improve through education and technology. Though this realization has prompted some to return to theism, most have followed the next logical step in the humanistic journey — namely, if there is no unifying morality in the modern world, then all individuals must determine their own personal morality. Although in the minds of many this conclusion sounds like the path to freedom and harmony, it has actually produced a society that is confused and divided along moral lines. Since society lacks both a shared understanding of truth and a shared commitment to the “good,” public discussion of moral matters has devolved to the lobbing of vitriolic and irrational verbal bombs.

There is a timeless and universal question that haunts all who find themselves stuck in this modern morass — “Is there such a thing as objective morality?” This haunting question cannot be separated from another — “If objective morality exists, what is its basis?” In this essay, I will argue that humanity is made to be moral, rather than to function as our

⁴ “Enlightenment rationalism” refers to the belief that humanity is capable of discovering all truth by relying upon human sense perceptions and rational processes. In this worldview, the scientific method has been awarded supreme authority to weigh in on and evaluate all truth claims. Humanism and modernism are used as synonymous terms for enlightenment rationalism in this essay.

⁵ I use “traditional morality” to refer to the moral views that reigned within western society for centuries prior to the rise of enlightenment rationalism. Traditional morality largely arose from theistic beliefs about the nature of the world and humanity’s role within it. Theism is used as a synonymous term for traditional morality in this essay.

⁶ I put “enemy” in quotes because this was and often continues to be how traditional moralists view enlightenment rationalists. However, as this essay hopefully demonstrates, rationalism is not the enemy of traditional morality. In fact, the argument of this essay relies heavily upon rational thinking!

own morality makers. The Bible has much to say about this topic and other issues that face modern society. Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not function like a rulebook with a concise list of moral do's and don'ts. Rather, the Bible provides a rational framework for understanding and addressing the moral issues that perplex our disjointed modern society. Since the most concise (and most controversial) biblical text on relevant moral issues is found in Romans 1, I will focus my analysis on this important passage.

INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 1:18-32

Romans 1:18-23 — ¹⁸For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, ¹⁹since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. ²¹For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

Primary argument of the passage

The primary argument of this passage must not only be understood in its immediate context, but it also must be understood in the letter's broader context. The big idea of chapters one through eleven of Romans is that all humanity is under God's judgment due to sin. "Sin" is understood not as individual "sins," but as the sinful nature that all humanity inherits at birth. In essence, our sinful nature predisposes us to rebel against God and live under the authority of and for the advancement of self. The original readers who came from a Jewish background would have fully accepted this proposition for Gentiles, but had a hard time seeing God's chosen people as sinful by nature. On the contrary, they understood themselves to be special and chosen based off of their family lineage.

Paul was very familiar with the Jewish worldview since he had been a rising star among the Jewish leadership prior to his conversion to Christ. In Romans 1:18-23, he begins his argument by asserting that, via creation and the natural world, God had revealed enough about Himself so that people were without excuse for denying Him. Paul's description of humanity's foolish thinking and idolatry clearly fit contemporary Jewish views of the Gentiles. However, Paul could just as easily be developing a chronological argument of how humanity had responded to knowledge of God. Regardless, his main point is that humanity rejected the knowledge they had of God, and instead chose to glorify and worship created things.

Romans 1:24-25 — ²⁴Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves.²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

Primary argument of the passage

This passage is integrally connected to the previous section, but deserves its own attention since it both highlights humanity's mental degradation process and also lays the foundation for the most currently controversial elements of Paul's argument. Simply put, Paul argues that rejection of God leads to identity confusion for humanity. Without an identity that is rooted in the Creator, humanity invents its own identity source — and without the supernatural, humans resort to their own “natural” explanations for both reality and their own ultimate identity. The Bible refers to this process as idolatry. Human history demonstrates that idolatry tends to lead to sexual immorality. Without God, humans tend to glorify the sex act, but usually at the loss of their humanness. Ironically, while elevating self-based images or while pursuing self-satisfying sensual experiences, our essential human personhood is lost. Surprisingly, rather than immediately condemn or strike down the rebels, God “delivered them over” to their foolish desires. This display of God's wrath is important to keep in mind for how we should apply the entire argument presented in Romans 1.

Romans 1:26-28 — ²⁶This is why God delivered them over to degrading passions. For even their females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.²⁷ The males in the same way also left natural relations with females and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error. ²⁸And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a worthless mind to do what is morally wrong.

Primary argument of the passage

These two verses have been argued over and interpreted *ad nauseam*. I do not have space in this essay to explore all the interpretations various people promote. Suffice it to say that, yes, this text is about how rejecting God leads to unnatural sexual actions. Specifically, it is about how it can lead to homosexuality — and homosexuality is morally wrong. Though this topic generally (and this conclusion specifically) is a lightning rod in modern culture, we must keep it in perspective within Paul's overall argument.

Romans 1:29-31 — ²⁹They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.

Primary argument of the passage

Interestingly, these three verses have been not been argued over and interpreted *ad nauseam*. However, Paul's point is still to outline the extent of human degradation and immorality. Yes, he argues that homosexuality is immoral, but he also argues that actions like greed, envy, gossip, arrogance, and disobedience to parents are immoral. In addition, non-actions are also immoral — failure to discern, failure to be trustworthy, failure to love, and failure to be merciful. Many view these actions and non-actions as more normal, but

Paul's argument is that they are just as immoral (and thus abnormal) as homosexuality. In other words, he is not presenting a formula to measure the severity of sins, but he is presenting a general argument for the universality of human folly apart from God. Such folly displays itself in the final verse of this passage:

Romans 1:32 — ³²Although they know full well God's just sentence—that those who practice such things deserve to die—they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.

Not only do individual humans ignore their consciences, but collective human society even applauds and approves of the above foolish thinking and behaviors.

"But, is there such a thing as objective morality?"

Does Romans 1:18-32 even address the main question of this essay? I think that it does in an indirect way. For example, one person may read this passage and wholeheartedly agree that some of the items in Paul's list are immoral while others are not. On the contrary, another person may read this passage and come to the opposite conclusions. Which person's moral stance is correct?

What is morality?

Morality is the term that refers to what "should" or "ought" to be. When one looks at the list of morally wrong actions and inactions in Romans 1, how does one determine if the list is true or authoritative? One individual may dislike and even abhor some items on the list, while another person may think those same items are acceptable. Which person is correct?

If there is no God, is it even possible to have objective morality?

Unsurprisingly, theists confidently answer "no" to the above question. However, one might be surprised to discover that most atheists also answer "no." Ironically, the atheist line of reason follows the same path that Paul does in Romans 1 — namely, how everything was created determines whether or not objective morality exists. Paul argues that since God created everything, he has the authority to determine what ought to be. Most atheists argue that the universe was created through the big bang — a non-moral event. They also argue that humanity was created through the non-moral evolutionary process. As a result, most atheists conclude that a non-moral cause and a non-moral process can't create a moral product.

Can humanity accept living in a non-moral world?

Rather than philosophize about this question, I find it helpful to interact with a few revealing examples.⁷ As you read these examples, take note of your response.

Example #1: Three Bosnian Serbs stand trial for creating and managing “rape factories” where Muslim women, some as young as twelve, endure unimaginable horrors. Victims tell of being savagely beaten, gang raped and tortured. The three Serbs state that they do not condone rape in general but argue that these particular women deserve it due to their ethnicity.

Example #2: A mother in South Carolina secures her two children in their car seats and then drives the family car into a lake, drowning both. She tells authorities she did it to win back her boyfriend, who didn’t want children.

Example #3: The website *Ku Klux Klan for Kids* teaches young readers to be racists through cartoons, interactive games, puzzles and bedtime stories that portray people of color as inferior and dangerous. Creators of the website argue that they are merely doing what any good parent would do – passing on truth, values and convictions.

Most respond to the above examples with some level of disgust. The negative response that these examples provoke reveals one’s moral framework. Humans seem to be truly unable to live consistently without measuring actions against what ought to happen. But, where does the, “That is horrible!” response to these examples come from?

Potential Explanations for the Existence of Morality

Although human history stretches back thousands of years, there are only a few viable explanations for the existence of morality:

1. Morality is a misfiring of evolution – each of us have different values wired in our brain.
2. Morality is determined by the powerful.
3. Morality is determined by culture.
4. Morality is determined by the individual.
5. Morality is determined by a good God (or gods).

Once again, rather than assess these explanations via philosophical abstraction, I find it helpful to run each of them through a test case — the Holocaust. The test is to determine if any of the five explanations justify the nearly universal “That is horrible!” response that humans have to the Holocaust.

Explanation #1: If morality is a misfiring of evolution, then Hitler and his Nazi cronies had anti-Semitism and malicious violence wired into their brains. However, if evolution predetermined that Hitler and his cronies would have this hard-wiring, then we can’t hold

⁷ These examples are taken directly from J.P. Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff’s book, *The God Conversation: Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

them morally culpable for their actions. Therefore, this explanation fails to account for the “That is horrible!” response to the Holocaust.

Explanation #2: If morality is determined by the powerful, then since Hitler and his Nazi cronies were in power they had the right to determine what was morally right or wrong. Once again, this explanation fails to explain how the Holocaust can be viewed as a moral atrocity.

Explanation #3: If morality is determined by culture, then Germans were right to create a culture in the 1930s and 1940s in which it was both acceptable and preferable to export and alienate Jews. In fact, numerous other cultures were also anti-Semitic in this era. Obviously, this explanation fails to account for the immorality of the Holocaust.

Explanation #4: If morality is determined by the individual, then Hitler was right to determine that what was best for him and Germany was the extermination of the Jews. Some individuals may exclaim “That is horrible!” when considering the Holocaust, but they don’t stand on any higher moral ground than did Hitler and his Nazi individuals.

The outcry over the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities prompted the Nuremberg trials (1945-1949). The most effective defense offered by those on trial was that they had simply obeyed their superiors or acted consistently with their own legal system, and that they therefore could not rightly be condemned because they deviated from the alien value system of their conquerors. In fact, this line of reason halted the trials! The chief counsel of the United States, Robert Jackson, came up with an answer. The only way to judge any culture, he argued, was to appeal to a “law above the law.” A “law above the law” transcends culture and applies to both the winners and losers of the war. The trial continued and justice was served.⁸ *But where did this “law above the law” or sense of “justice” come from?* We are left with only one remaining explanation for the moral outrage over the Holocaust — morality is determined by a good God (or gods). This was the conclusion that Paul reached and argued for in his letter to the church at Rome.

Concluding Thoughts

If Paul’s argument in Romans and the argument developed in this essay are true, then how should we interact with a morally-confused world? I have come to the following general conclusions:

1. **Nobody should care what the Bible says about morality if there is no God.** If God does not exist, then the Bible is just another book written by a bunch of people. It may be a very influential and amazing book, but at the end of the day there is nothing supernatural about it.
2. **The point of focus when talking with non-believers needs to be on the existence of God.** If Christians harass non-Christians about their immoral behavior, then they are basically promoting an unbiblical works-based theology. In

⁸ Moreland and Muehlhoff, 116-117.

fact, the Bible actually argues that when non-believers live immoral lives they are actually living consistent with their nature. True change comes from the inside out after people accept what Christ has done for them.

3. **The existence of objective morality has tremendous societal implications.**

- a. *Without objective morality, social activism is nearly useless.* If there is no objective morality, then social activists should actually be called “personal activists” because they are merely advocating for issues that they care about personally. They have no basis from which to argue for what society ought to be like.
- b. *Without objective morality, moral outrage is baseless.* There may be inconvenient events. There may also be personally painful events. But without objective morality, there are no true morally outrageous events.
- c. *Without objective morality, society will (eventually) crumble.* The loss of objective morality leaves a society in the same position that the lawyers found themselves at the Nuremberg Trials — morally outraged without any ability to rationally back up their outrage. Currently, Western society repeatedly insists upon being morally outraged over certain events, while simultaneously tearing apart the foundation upon which this moral outrage rests.

[Return to Study #7](#)

Appendix C:

From 21st Century Christian Parenting (by Dennis McCallum)

Appendix 2: Dangers to children's brains from overuse of IT (Internet Technology)

When decent video games first appeared, my kids were young. It struck me as quite unnatural when I watched them zone out on video games. Nothing else could so grip kids in rapt attention for hours on end. Watching cartoons or movies also grips kids, but nothing like gaming.

I was highly suspicious, in part because after a lengthy session of gaming I could see how they came out seeming like zombies. They appeared to have spent their emotional and mental energy in a way that left them noticeably altered.

They also engaged in long conversations about the details of various games and anyone (like me) who didn't play those games felt left out. I began the very unpopular practice of limiting game time, using password protection on my computer—the only device available at that time. We refused to get a game console, and this was before smart phones. I think as a family, we were less entangled in gaming than many other families I knew.

Later, when they were teenagers, I started thinking about getting a family computer so they could learn how to use one, and do their homework on it. Big mistake! That computer rarely served any purpose other than being a game console. The frenzied pursuit of new levels and techniques bothered me so much I again began locking the computer down, and allocating time on it.

When I went back into student ministry in the 90s I saw rampant gaming as a major hurdle to building fellowship and spiritual maturity. In college ministry we have ministry houses where committed students live together. The specter of obsessed students spending hours a day gaming threatened the spirituality of most male houses. (Not as big with females for some reason).

But those were the lame old days of gaming, and social media had hardly begun. Smart phones were unknown. Now we face a landscape more threatening than anything known when I raised my kids. With phones and laptops in everyone's hands, access to IT [Information Technology] is always within easy reach.

NEW SCIENCE

And now the bad news hits. Science is demonstrating, just in the past few years, that IT overuse is visibly damaging to young people's brains. The intense stimulation games and social media produce dwarfs the stimulation possible from things like reading a book or talking to someone.

It has been difficult to convince students that anything is dangerous in IT overuse, but even when some agree that it is damaging, they often still can't quit.

More alarming by far has been our failure to persuade Christian parents that IT overuse is a threat to their children. Parents are giving smart phones and tablets to their children at earlier and earlier ages, usually with data enabled. The Office of Communications, United Kingdom recently reported "a third (34%) of preschoolers (aged 3-4) own their own media device, such as a tablet or game console." They also reported

that the average UK 16-24 year old is now “spending more time on media and communications than on sleeping.”⁹ We believe the U.S. is no different.

But we may see change coming. With advances in MRI brain mapping, scientists are now demonstrating that gaming and phone obsession are mental disorders. This view is backed by visible, measurable, pathological changes in the brains of over-users. These changes match the changes seen in substance addicts (like cocaine or opioids).

Because I am not a scientist, I’m not going to try to make this case here. Instead, I’m going to let the scientists doing frontline research speak for themselves. I have collected a number of statements from recent research journals, only deleting lengthy names of brain regions or processes, or adding definitions in brackets [] for ease of reading. Most of these articles are available for free or a few dollars, so if you suspect I’m taking things out of context, read them for yourself. Right now, take some time to read through what the experts are saying in dozens of recent research articles.

As you read these, consider this: most people think you shouldn’t smoke because it can damage your lungs. Here’s something that damages your brain!

THE RESEARCH

The American Psychiatric Association’s DSM-5 now includes Internet Gaming Disorder for future consideration as a formal “mental disorder”; stating, “studies suggest that when these individuals are engrossed in Internet games, certain pathways in their brains are triggered in the same direct and intense way that a drug addict’s brain is affected by a particular substance.”¹⁰

[Explain what peer reviewed research articles and research surveys are—the gold standard for scientific knowledge. Notice the journals in the footnotes and see these are prominent, accredited research journals.]

There is empirical evidence that extensive exposure to videogame playing during childhood may lead to neuroadaptation [where the brain rewires itself] and structural changes in neural *regions associated with addiction*.... Digital natives exhibit a higher prevalence of screen-related “addictive” behavior that reflect impaired neurological reward-processing and impulse-control mechanisms [Emphasis added. The brain is losing control of reward processing and impulse control. These structural changes could be lasting, even permanent].

Associations are emerging between screen dependency disorders such as Internet Addiction Disorder and specific neurogenetic polymorphisms [changes in DNA and gene expression], abnormal neural tissue and neural function.¹¹

Screen dependency disorders, even at subclinical levels, involve high levels of discretionary screen time, inducing greater child sedentary behavior thereby reducing vital aerobic fitness, which plays an important role in the neurological health of children, particularly in brain structure and function. Screen viewing now begins in infancy with new research finding that the prevalence of screen viewing in children aged under two years ‘is high and appears to increase steadily across

⁹ Aric Sigman, “Screen Dependency Disorders: a new challenge for child neurology,” *Journal of the International Child Neurology Association*, 2017, 2.

¹⁰ American Psychiatric Association, “Internet Gaming Disorder Fact Sheet,” 2013.<http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Internet%20Gaming%20Disorder%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

¹¹ Aric Sigman, “Screen Dependency Disorders,” 1.

age groups.¹²

The development and maintenance of SDD [Screen Dependency Disorders] are increasingly seen as a maladaptive [sick] interaction between the neurological structures and functions which underlie the central components of addiction: reward, pleasure, craving and reinforcement processing; learning and memory; impaired executive functioning, inhibitory control, decision-making and emotion management.¹³

Functional brain correlates of SDD [Screen Dependency Disorders] are also found in the prefrontal cortex [key for regulating behavior, personality expression, decision making, and moderating social behavior] and limbic structures [involved in motivation and emotional behaviors]. *Typical characteristics in addiction* of impaired executive functioning and inhibitory control are related to lower functional connectivity in [these] circuits.¹⁴ [Emphasis added. These changes match those found in drug addicts.]

Various screen activities are reported to induce structural and functional brain plasticity in adults. However, childhood is a time of significantly greater changes in brain anatomical structure and connectivity. [So it would be doubly dangerous to expose children to these powerful stimuli].¹⁵

In a study of 248 healthy children aged 5 – 17 years Takeuchi et al. (2016) reported highly significant correlations between daily average hours of videogame play and micro-structural changes over a 3-year period in [MRI imaging.... These reflected] a reduction in tissue density. Such changes are uniquely sensitive to neural plasticity, particularly within the dopaminergic system [the reward system characterized by dopamine].

In conclusion, increased video game play is directly or indirectly associated with delayed development of the microstructure in extensive brain regions. The conditions in which children play videogames for long periods of time may lead to unfavorable neurocognitive development. Many of the regions in which longitudinal changes were reported are those routinely implicated in studies of SDD [screen dependency disorder], gambling disorders and substance addiction.¹⁶

In other words, gaming [and social media, especially popular with girls] deliver such powerful stimulation and reward that normal activities pale in comparison. The result is damage to the reward system in the brain. Over-users reach a point where they cannot enjoy anything as much as their screen usage. This is the same thing seen in the brains of drug addicts.

Dopamine is implicated in reward processing and addiction. Hypodopaminergic functioning [abnormal, low dopamine reward function] and a resultant overall reward deficiency characterize SDD [screen dependency disorder]. “Videogame playing has been associated with dopamine

¹² Aric Sigman, “Screen Dependency Disorders,” 2. He points out “Early screen exposure has been facilitated by the advent of infant/toddler products such as the ‘Newborn-to-Toddler Apptivity Seat for iPad®’ [baby cradle with iPad placed directly in infant’s face] and the ‘2-in-1 iPotty®’ – a combination of iPad and potty designed to help young children with potty training.”

¹³ M. Brand, K.S. Young, C. Laier, K. Wolfling, M. N. Potenza, “Integrating psychological and neurobiological considerations regarding the development and maintenance of specific Internet-use disorders: An Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model,” *Neuro-science & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 2016 Dec 31;71:252-66.

¹⁴ Aric Sigman, “Screen Dependency Disorders,” 3.

¹⁵ Aric Sigman, “Screen Dependency Disorders 4.

¹⁶ Takeuchi, Y. Taki, H. Hashizume, K. Asano, M. Asano, Y. Sassa, S. Yokota, Y. Kotozaki, R. Nouchi, R. Kawashima, “Impact of videogame play on the brain’s microstructural properties: cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses,” *Molecular Psychiatry*. 2016. Jan 5. 21.

release similar in magnitude to that of drugs of abuse.”¹⁷

Abnormal dopamine regulation of the prefrontal cortex is also thought to underlie the enhanced motivational value and loss of control over screen activity such as gaming, typical of ‘addicted’ subjects.¹⁸

Potential presynaptic abnormalities are also observed in subjects with IAD [Internet Addiction Disorder], who exhibit a significantly lower dopamine transporter expression level.¹⁹

These “changes can be viewed as ‘neuromolecular scars’ that dramatically alter an individual’s adaptability and contribute importantly to the addicted state.”²⁰

[Holy shit!]

It has been established that repeated exposure to non-drug rewards [like those from video gaming] can induce neural plasticity [changes in brain structures and wiring] in addiction-related circuitry [the same circuits changed by drug addiction are changed here]. In some children, this may contribute to compulsive engagement in screen-related activities that resembles substance addiction.²¹

Extensive research is increasingly finding that adolescents and young adults with SDD exhibit microstructural and volumetric differences in, or abnormalities of, both grey and white matter compared to healthy controls. Differences in brain structure and function are observed in many of the same regions implicated in drug addiction.²²

A recent study involving Harvard Medical School has reported ‘the first morphological evidence of altered brain structure ... in college students with mobile phone dependence’. Microstructural variations were examined using fMRI [functional MRI]... In this cross-sectional study, lower grey matter volume was reported in subjects classified as mobile phone dependent relative to controls [in several areas of the brain].²³

This study introduces another major alarm, that smart phone addiction is associated with “lower grey matter volume.” In other words, the actual size of their brains was lower than the control subjects. They also show reduced density (and therefore functionality) in brain white matter of addicts.

Nucleus accumbens [a region with a significant role in the cognitive processing of motivation, aversion, and reward] volumes were positively correlated with internet addiction test scores.... The authors stated the results were “consistent with substance use disorder findings.”

New, whole-brain analyses of functional connectivity in SDD subjects ... Interestingly, pre-clinical levels of Internet addiction were associated with similar regions and connections as

¹⁷ A . Weinstein, M. Lejoyeux, “New developments on the neurobiological and pharmacogenetic mechanisms underlying internet and videogame addiction,” *The American Journal on Addictions*, 2015, 24: 117-125.

¹⁸ Y. Zhu, H. Zhang, M. Tian, “Molecular and Functional Imaging of Internet Addiction,” *BioMed Research International*, 2015, Article ID 378675. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2015/378675>.

¹⁹ H. Hou, S. Jia, S. Hu, et al., “Reduced Striatal Dopamine Transporters in People with Internet Addiction Disorder,” *Journal of Biomedicine and Biotechnology*, 2012:854524.

²⁰ A. J. Robison and E. J. Nestler, “Transcriptional and epigenetic mechanisms of addiction.” *Nature reviews: Neuroscience*, 2011 Nov 1;12(11):623-37.

²¹ Aric Sigman, “Screen Dependency Disorders,” 4.

²² Aric Sigman, “Screen Dependency Disorders,” 4.

²³ Wang Y, Zou Z, Song H, Xu X, Wang H, Uquillas FD, Huang X. Altered gray matter volume and white matter integrity in college students with mobile phone dependence. *Frontiers in psychology*. 2016;7.

clinical cases of addiction.²⁴

The authors concluded ‘these results imply that people with IGD may be associated with functional network dysfunction, including impaired executive control and emotional management’²⁵

Compared to healthy controls, IGD participants showed decreased VMHC [a method of measuring connectivity between hemispheres in the brain] between the left and right superior [multiple structures and areas]. Further analyses showed Chen Internet Addiction Scale [was related to these reductions].²⁶

The United States Department of Health has issued ‘recommended limits for screen time’ as one of its national ‘health improvement priorities’ and a key ‘disease prevention objective’ in which ‘children aged 0 to 2 years’ should be exposed to ‘no television, videos or play video games’ while those over 2 years should ‘view television, videos, or play video games ... use a computer or play computer games outside of school [for non-school work] for no more than 2 hours a day’²⁷

Two hours a day seems way too loose to me. For something this dangerous, I would like to see limits way lower than that, including days when they don’t game at all. If that’s too hard to do, it’s evidence that addiction is already forming.

Probably more wise still would be the solution being pursued by top executives at Google and other tech companies in Silicon Valley:

At the Waldorf School of the Peninsula in Los Altos, the majority of parents work at Google, Apple or Yahoo; yet these tech-savvy parents insist on no-tech classrooms precisely because they understand tech—and its dangers—better than most.²⁸

These parents, who know more than anyone about the addictive properties built into their software, are sending their kids to schools where no computers are provided or used. So this is not a rural, old-school revolt against the dangers of tech.

After spending years doing research into computer use in schools, Dr. Jane Healy changed her view from expecting great benefits from tech use in schools. Instead of helping, she now believes that the tech does more harm than good. She feels strongly that “time on the computer might interfere with development of everything from the young child’s motor skills to his or her ability to think logically and distinguish between reality and fantasy.”²⁹

Based on these findings, Sigman calls for pediatricians to “educate parents about brain development in the early years, provide guidance to families about child media consumption, including limiting media use: raising the age of initiation to screen activities, reducing the degree of exposure and discouraging screens in

²⁴ T. Wen and S. Hsieh “Network-Based Analysis Reveals Functional Connectivity Related to Internet Addiction Tendency.” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 2016,10:6.

²⁵ L. Wang, L. Wu, Et.al., “Altered brain functional networks in people with Internet gaming disorder: Evidence from resting-state fMRI,” *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*. 2016 Aug 30;254:156-63.

²⁶ Yao Wang, et al. “Decreased Prefrontal Lobe Interhemispheric Functional Connectivity in Adolescents with Internet Gaming Disorder: A Primary Study Using Resting-State fMRI” 1.

²⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2020*, Objective PA-8: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/physical-activity/objectives>.

²⁸ Nicholas Kardaras, *Glow Kids*, 31.

²⁹ Nicholas Kardaras, PhD, *Glow Kids*, 4.

children's' bedrooms."³⁰

IT overuse and unhappiness.

In an earlier chapter, we discussed Jeanne Twenge's book, *iGen*, that demonstrates the connection between young people's hours on screen and unhappiness. She shows multiple charts correlating things like feelings of loneliness, suicidal thinking, suicide attempts, major depression episodes, and anxiety with number of hours on screen. So it's not just gaming that should concern you.

The heart of the problem is that young people need face-to-face relating time, not relating to letters on a screen. God made us for relationship, for love. Typing on a social media page, or pounding a gun button, isn't the same. Twenge shows that the online lifestyle in and of itself is wreaking havoc among teenagers today.

Parents, including Christian parents, seem to be blissfully ignorant of these dangers, readily providing more and more on-screen opportunities for their kids.

[clip]

The Big Picture

The modern world is increasingly unsafe for children. But most parents are focused on minor dangers or even pseudo dangers that pose a negligible threat. Meanwhile, the same parents fail to realize that the IT devices and access they offer their kids pose a much greater danger than they think—damage to their brains and psyche that could last into adulthood.

This damage could also affect their ability to succeed in school, in careers, and in relationships. Only now are scientists coming to grasp the scope of the danger here, and it is likely to go much further. Is it a coincidence that ADD and ADHD diagnoses have gone from virtually none to explode through the roof at the same time IT overuse became an issue? Not if we can believe what experts in this field say.³¹ We're still waiting on more research that will likely show additional connections between this unnatural, highly stimulating activity and problems with young people.

So as believers, how do we respond to this?

Do we have a problem here?

At the least, three hours of gaming are three hours not investing in something spiritual, personal, and positive

Any ideas for how to improve here?

[Return to Study #10](#)

³⁰ Aric Sigman, "Screen Dependency Disorders," 8.

³¹ Professor of neuroscience and expert on addiction, Nicholas Kardaras, PhD, states it plainly: "An ever-increasing amount of clinical research correlates screen tech with psychiatric disorders like ADHD, addiction, anxiety, depression, increased aggression and even psychosis. Perhaps most shocking of all, recent brain-imaging studies conclusively show that excessive screen exposure can neurologically damage a young person's developing brain in the same way that cocaine addiction can." *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking our Kids—and How to Break the Trance*, (NY: St. Martin's Press 2016) 3. He adds, "Ironically, while we've declared a so-called War on Drugs, we've allowed this virtual drug—which Dr. Peter Whybrow, director of neuroscience at UCLA, calls 'electronic cocaine'; which Commander Dr. Andrew Doan, who has an M.D. and Ph.D. in neuroscience and heads addiction research for the U.S. Navy, calls digital 'pharmakeia' (Greek for 'drug'); and which Chinese researchers call 'electronic heroin'—to slip into the homes and classrooms of our youngest and most vulnerable, seemingly oblivious to any negative effects." 4.