

## A Strategy for Faithful Discipleship

Romans 15:4,14

***“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” V.4***

***“I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” V.14***

### Intr:

I would like to challenge us this morning to imagine that we are detectives trying to find what it is that God wants to teach us from His Word.

- What does the Word of God say about discipleship?
- What does it mean to us?
- What should we do when we find out?
- What does God require from us?

These are just some of the questions that God puts at us.

If we were to put all of Paul’s letters together we would get a pretty good picture of what a healthy

Christian believer in Christ should look like.

This morning I would simply call this sermon, **“A Strategy for Faithful Discipleship.”**

I would like to cast the vision this morning for what we are trying to do here at PCN.

A discipling ministry is of great importance because of its exceptional value to the one being discipled.

Now – we must understand this, because if we miss this then we miss everything Christ has challenged in our living the Christian life.

But unfortunately, most Christians stay in a stage of spiritual immaturity for so many years and it happens this way for several reasons:

- 1) Because there is no one to take an interest in their growth in Christ or
- 2) Possibly the church doesn’t take the initiative to see this happen.
- 3) The believer is reluctant to follow thru in this area of discipleship.

Paul even had an issue with some of the believers in the Church of Corinth when he addressed them this way, ***“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed you are still not ready.***

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***You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?" I Corinthians 3:1-3***

**That's what I like about Paul – He doesn't mince any words here – he just shoots from the hip right straight at the problem.**

Paul is saying here that being in Christ doesn't mean we're necessarily mature, but the goal is for every believer to become mature in Christ.

But how does that happen? That's what we have been trying to preach and teach the last few Sundays.

Gen. Supt. Jerry Porter wrote an article recently that caught my attention when he reminded us, **Jesus said He would build His church and then Jesus tells us to make disciples. Jesus said "Teach them!"**

**The Apostles Paul give a persuasive advice on Christian growth and maturity.**

**The Apostle Peter describes the process of spirituality in I Peter 2:2-3.**

***"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."***

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Just as a newborn baby has an unending appetite for milk so the newborn Christian has a compelling desire and hunger for the Word of God.

As I look back on raising my two children there are high points and low points.

High points are when the children are born. My, that was so exciting to witness the birth of my two children.

I remember exciting moments with each one.

I remember another high point was the first time our son Chris said his first words.

I was especially excited when he began to crawl. I was even more thrilled when he learned to take his first steps when we lived in Laurelville, Ohio where we pastored a country church.

He no longer had to crawl around on his hands and knees.

**The Word of God serves as a mirror and in the mirror we see our reflection of where we are continuing in the crawling stage or we have gotten up off our knees and are now standing and moving forward for the Lord.**

**Baby Christians are called to grow.**

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**In I Corinthians 3 the Apostle Paul addresses the problem of new Christians staying too long in the baby stage.**

He writes to the people in the church in Corinth: **verse 1-2 “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk...not solid food...for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed you are still not ready.”**

To rephrase what Paul is saying: **“It’s time to get up off you knees. You’ve been crawling long enough. Get up and get into the meat of God’s Word.”**

From the teachings of Peter and Paul we see characteristics of those who are spiritually immature and those that are more mature.

**Growing Christians are following Jesus as Disciples.**

**Discipleship is a process. A disciple is a person following Jesus.**

**A disciple is a “learner.”**

**A disciple is “teachable.”**

**A disciple is committed to living as Jesus lived and**

**A disciple is obedient to all that Jesus taught.**

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Jesus tells us to continue His work. But how do we do this? That’s what this sermon is about!

Jesus began by following this strategy. He poured His life into a few men who would continue His work.

It reads in II Timothy 2:2 **“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”**

It’s significant that in one of the earliest statements that Jesus made to His men, He did not say,

“Follow me and I will be your friend.”

“Follow me and I will solve your problems.”

But He did say, **“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”**

In other words, Jesus had a task for these men to do.

He called men and women to Himself so that they could be equipped to reach a lost world.

**1. The Value of Discipling to Christ.**

**“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the**

***Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20***

Could the value that Christ placed on the discipling process be the one thing that we have not done very well as believers in His Church?

Would you think with me this morning – Could you agree with me that if all of us were more diligent in becoming genuine followers of Christ – we would have had a bigger impact on our world today?

Would you be willing to make a commitment to follow His example?

When Paul approached the Roman Christians in this passage it's interesting to note that Paul didn't try to put them on a guilt trip, instead he actually challenged and encouraged them.

I believe Paul would say the same thing about most believers here in this crowd today and point out that basically - you are healthy and balanced in your faith in Jesus.

Paul would say to us, ***“You're full of goodness and complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”***

Now it's important here to notice a sense of balance.

It seems to me there are **Four major types of believers in the church today**: Let me try to explain to you the characteristics of these types.

### **1) First, there is the Self-sufficient saint.**

Some of these people are true believers and some are not. There are some in the church today who do not have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus.

These are people who are working hard to be kind and good and “Christian.” In their way of thinking.

They want to be called a Christian and many people in America profess to be Christians and many are not.

Unfortunately, these people have no spiritual foundation.

They don't understand the Scriptures and truly believe that if they are to be saved they are going to have to do it the old fashioned way - they are going to have to EARN it.

And as a result they either must water down the nature of their own sin or try to live up to impossible expectations.

These people are often exhausted from trying to do everything.

They lack joy and they seem to be filled with guilt.

## 2) **The Second Group of people are the Scholar saints.**

These are the believers who are the flip side of the self-sufficient saints.

These folks are well read.

They are adept at theology and can argue a good point, in other words they are great in a debate. Oh, I remember them when I use to listen to them in their Sunday School classes argue over doctrine.

They are great at pointing out the flaws in other people's theology but they are very weak in putting that theology into practice.

You know – they're probably like the Sadducees and Pharisees in Jesus' day.

They are knowledgeable and educated about Christ and their theology, but they haven't made Christ Lord of their lives.

They have a lot of knowledge but they have no obedience, no ministry, no love.

## 3) **The third group is the Sideline saints.**

You can ask any coach about the people who like to coach from the sidelines or what we refer to as armchair coaches watching the tube on Saturday.

These people criticize every play (of course, after the play doesn't work), and they question personnel moves, and question the coach's intent and heart.

All the while they sit on the sidelines, eating their popcorn, and visiting with their friends.

When the game is over they won't return until the next game.

These are people who will withhold their tithe and their offerings if things upset them or

They will withhold their tithe if things don't go the way they want them to go, as if to blackmail the pastor and the church board.

Now – PTL I don't know of any one like that here at PCN!

But let me remind you again what I said some time ago and that was whenever new people come to a church their tithe comes about 6 months later and whenever some decides to leave the church their tithe stops 6 months before they leave. God help us today!

I'm not sure how these people who profess to be Christian believers are going to face Jesus at the Judgment Seat of the Lamb and give an answer to that.

There are people like this in almost every church.

They are part time believers.

They are great at telling other people what upsets them and what the church should be doing and always ready with a critical comment about someone.

They are good at making demands but they do little in the area of effective service for Jesus.

And the tragic thing is when they leave the company of believers, they leave their profession behind.

#### 4) **The Roman Christians however were Scriptural saints.**

The true believer is the one who is characterized by goodness of Godly living.

This believer is anchored in the Truth of God's Word.

Jesus Christ taught the truth.  
Jesus taught that the truth was important.  
He told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth.

However He also told His disciples that you would be able to distinguish a true believer from a false believer by . . . **their "Fruit."**

#### **Summary:**

A true believer and follower of Christ studies ***"to show themselves approved a workman that does not need to be ashamed, who correctly handles the Word of truth." II Tim. 2:15***

But a true believer also works at applying that truth to their living.

They don't just talk about expanding their ministries, they give their time and energy to those ministries.

They become competent believers who help others in their walk with Christ and they desire to see others grow in their faith also.

Every young Christians needs a spiritual mentor.

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If Moms and Dads see the value of instructing, training, protecting and providing for their children to grow, it is so much more important for us in the spiritual realm to care about those who are less mature and encourage them toward spiritual maturity.

The tragedy is that the need is great, but the available disciplers are few.

## **II. Discipling increases the rate of the Disciple's Growth.**

When a person becomes a Christian, he enters a new life in which growth is essential and should be constant.

Spiritual maturity is a life long process.

Spiritual maturity is spelled GROW.

Peter is speaking to new Christians when he says: ***"Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self control, and to self control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness and to godliness, brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness, love."*** 2 Peter 1:5-7

### **1. Endurance is a characteristic of spiritual maturity.**

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Looking over the last five to ten years of your life, what do you wish you had not quit?

I'm sure you are happy to have quit some bad habits or maybe you're still asking God to help you get rid of some bad habits that are hurting you spiritually and physically.

But maybe you wish you had finished High School or College!

You wish you had kept on taking voice lessons or piano lessons.

You wish you had worked out a difference with a loved one or relative.

You wish you had maintained that long-term friendship that dissolved when the going got rough.

### **Why do we tend to quit so early?**

Because it is easier to quit than to endure!

It's easier to sit and watch TV than to take a night class to learn a skill.

It's easier to walk out of an argument than to stay and work through the conflict.

It's easier to read the paper, drink coffee and watch golf in your bathrobe on Sunday morning than to get

up and get dressed and take you family to church on a regular basis.

It's easier to do what you want to do with your life than to kneel before God, and turn you life over to God and wait patiently for Him to lead you.

## **2. A second characteristic of spiritual mature is Self Discipline, achieving success through delaying gratification.**

Some people seem to succeed at everything they try.

They have successful careers, they relate well to their families and they are active growing Christians.

They are even physically fit.

When you get to know these people you note one common factor – they practice self-discipline.

By contrast there are people that seem to have a string of setbacks, disasters and failures.

If you get close to them they explain why these calamities have come to them:

“Well, you know, I just started to let things slide.””

“I put off doing my homework.”

“I neglected to follow up leads.”

“I didn't keep my eye on the store.”  
 “I didn't push my chair back from the bar and walk out sober.”  
 “I didn't take care of myself.”  
 “I didn't spend time with my family.”  
 “I thought problems would solve themselves.”

Most of the reasons can be summed up in one word: “Discipline.” That's where we get our key word Disciple.

Discipline is one of the most important character qualities a person can possess.

Self-discipline is lived out on a daily basis by your commitment to delayed gratification.

Self-discipline is important to going on toward spiritual maturity.

You will hear growing Christians say:

“ I've learned over the years this important lesson.

If I discipline myself to spend ten or fifteen minutes early in the morning in a quiet place getting a proper perspective on my walk with the Lord---writing down some of my thoughts, reading my Bible, listening to a tape, praying, the whole rest of my day seems much more satisfying.

Let me ask you: “Is it worth it to roll out of bed while the house is still cold and invest your time and energy on something worthwhile, then the rest of your day will be better.

This is delayed gratification practicing spiritual discipline.

Do you know it takes thirty days or more to develop healthy habits.

It’s helpful to plan in advance how you are going to practice spiritual disciplines.

The night before determine to get up 15 – 30 minutes early to have a time of devotion and prayer.

Find someone to hold you accountable.

Have the person ask you how you are doing in practicing self-discipline and delaying gratification.

You see – when you do this then you begin to spiritually mature in your walk with Christ and then you are able to in return help another who needs help doing the same thing.

The consistent, personal attention given to that new believer by a discipler can only increase the rate of this process of spiritual growth.

**The Goal here is clear – First you become a Disciple and then you Make Disciples.**

Being a disciple in the early church meant a first-hand involvement in the mission of Christ – **making disciples.**

And it’s important to understand in the early church’s **disciple-making process** was to continually expand this base of new disciples.

That’s part of my vision for PCN.

To always be expanding our base of new people getting saved and then getting them discipled.

**Back to the Basics means that when we are saved from our sins and we become believers in Christ and we walk towards becoming a Disciple a follower of Christ:**

- **it means we are to share the Good News of Christ with others.**
- **It means worshiping God.**  
It’s the basis of the believers worship. It’s the Christians response to Jesus because of what He has done for them.
- **It means doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith.**
- **It means watching for the return of Christ.**
- **It means our sins are forgiven.**

**BUT ABOVE ALL AND BEYOND THIS, IT MEANS TELLING PEOPLE THAT THE SAVIOR HAS COME AND THAT IN BELIEVING IN HIM THEY TOO CAN HAVE ETERNAL LIFE AND BECAUSE OF THIS WE BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD!**

**So every one of us believer's commitment to Christ includes this fact that we reproduce ourselves and continue the discipleship making chain so that it never ends until Jesus comes and takes us out of this earth.**

**How do we do this?**

As I've already said this can only happen through the Power of God's Holy Spirit. We can't do this on our own!

Now I want you to think about someone whom you know and love that is a fairly new Christian believer.

**Think about it this way:** Imagine the benefit of that new Christian believer linking up with a mature Christian like yourself who desires to spend time with them, guiding and giving them direction in their spiritual walk with Jesus.

That person would be able to encourage you when you were depressed or down.

**Think about the promotion of fellowship in here at PCN.**

**What would that do for you and for new Christians who are still in a word babes in Christ?**

One of the great truths of Christianity is that Christians belong to each other.

The Scripture says, ***“Let us consider how we may spur one another on.”***

We are all brothers and sisters in the same family of God.

We are suppose to be partners in the same mission.

Not only should we Christians, brothers and sisters in the Lord, consider the reality that they we belong to one another, but we need to ***“spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”***

Christians must watch over each other in the same way committed family members look after each other.

When we do this right - that mature person in Christ would be able to teach you biblical principles that would help you develop good spiritual habits.

It would be a person whom you would be accountable to - to help you in your walk with Christ.

**Illustration:**

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I don't share this with you to draw attention to me, however, let me tell you that I'm a pretty good golfer.

I like to golf. I've been playing for close to 40 years. If I were to take someone out on the golf course and teach them the game of golf, I would start with the basics.

I've done this before and I can say that one whom I taught is now a better golfer than I am.

### **Application:**

There are many Christians in the Body of Christ whose rate of spiritual growth would increase if they entered into a discipling relationship with a more mature believer.

That's why we continually stress Small Bible Study Groups here at PCN. Why do we do this? Because we want to see you grow to be like Jesus.

But it's even more than that. It's taking on that one person and helping to shape them into the disciple Jesus wants them to be, each of you then being accountable to one another.

### **III. Discipling stops wrong behavioral patterns in the Disciple.**

We are all creatures of habit, and it is unfortunate but true that we can continue living in habit patterns that are displeasing to God after we become Christians.

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The Christian just coming out of the old life needs to understand that because he is now a new person in Christ, certain habits of their life needs to change.

Now – How does that happen? What does that look like?

When we get saved it changes some of the things we do.

It changes some of the places where we go.

It changes our language.

It changes some of the ways we think.

We've taken off the old man and put on the new man.

And folks, listen – we have a responsibility to help one another in loving and gentle ways of encouragement.

God put the Body of Christ together for the purpose of spurring each other on in our walk with Christ.

I then challenge you this morning to a life of committed discipleship.

Why are you a Christian?

You are a Christian to follow the Christ! Follow Him!

