

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 10-5-14 AM NOTES
"MATURING DISCIPLES: THE KEY INGREDIENTS FOR MATURITY"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
#5 in Series, "The Making, Maturing, and Mobilizing of Disciples"

John 10:10b (NKJV) "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly."

John 10:10b (AMP) "... life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)."

I. Commit to a Local Church

Acts 9:4b (NKJV) "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Ephesians 5:25b (NKJV) "...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

Matthew 16:18b (NKJV) "...on this rock I will build My church..."

Matthew 18:17 (NKJV) "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

Acts 2:41 (NKJV) "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*."

Hebrews 13:17 (NKJV) "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

1. Is this a church where God's Word is faithfully taught?
2. Is this a church where sound doctrine matters?
3. Is this a church in which the Gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed?
4. Is this a church committed to reaching non-Christians with the Gospel?
5. Is this a church whose leaders are characterized by humility and integrity?
6. Is this a church where people strive to live by God's Word?
7. Is this a church where I can find and cultivate godly relationships?
8. Is this a church where members are challenged to serve?
9. Is this a church that is willing to kick me out (practices church discipline)?
10. Is this a church I'm willing to join "as is" with enthusiasm?

II. Embrace Suffering

1 Peter 5:10 (NKJV) “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*.”

A. Perfect

B. Establish

C. Strengthen

D. Settle

III. Strive for Fellowship

“If your church is anything like the typical church, it contains people who believe that if they arrive on Sunday morning in time to hear the sermon, they have met their weekly Christian requirement. They showed up, the preacher showed up, God showed up—and everyone went home happy. People who practice this kind of Christianity fail to understand the nature of the church and the nature of the faith they profess. Being a disciple means far more than listening to sermons or attending Bible studies, just taking in the truth. The problem with this is that proclamation without fellowship leads to dead orthodoxy. It is truth with no life. On the other hand, fellowship without the proclamation of the truth leads to empty sentimentalism. This is ‘touchy-feely’ religion with nothing to touch or feel. Some people say, ‘Our church preaches the Word.’ Other people say, ‘Well, our church loves people.’ If a church can’t say it does both, it is a lopsided congregation.”

—Tony Evans

Genuine fellowship or community (*koinonia* in the Greek) involves partnership in a common life (Christ’s life), a common purpose (the glory of God), a common love (to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves), and a common mission (make disciples of all people groups). This partnership includes a sharing of friendship, truth, encouragement, and even material possessions when there is a need. Biblical fellowship at its essence is not an activity; it is a relationship.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 10-5-14 AM
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#5 in Series, “The Making, Maturing, and Mobilizing of Disciples”

REVIEW: We began this series 4 weeks ago by looking at the making of disciples. We saw that making disciples who make disciples is **the mission** of the church. The mission never changes – we exist as a church to make disciples. Each disciple, each follower of Christ is made a new creation in Christ and then in following Christ experiences what He came to give those who follow Him as His disciple. **John 10:10b (NKJV)** “...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” The Amplified Version translates that last part of **John 10:10 (AMP)** “...life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).” Into a world of spiritually dead people looking for life in all the wrong places, Jesus sends His disciples on mission to proclaim the Gospel to the spiritually dead that they may be made alive through the new birth and then as is described in Luke 9:23b they deny themselves, and take up their cross daily, and follow Him. What a mission we have been given! What a glorious mission. We are charged to go to spiritually dead people and share the glorious truth that they can have life, not just an existence type of life, but abundant, overflowing, to the full life. That life is in knowing and following Jesus Christ. Why do we treat the mission of making disciples like a huge burden that has been laid on us?

In the second message, we saw the process of making disciples. We evangelize non-believers by sharing the Gospel. After a person receives Christ we spend some time with them (a few weeks) imparting some basics of the Christian life – assurance of salvation, the importance of publically professing Christ through baptism, their identity in Christ, the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and spiritual disciplines. As soon as possible after their coming to Christ, we get them plugged in to a local church where they can experience a broader equipping and biblical fellowship or community.

In the third message on making disciples we saw the importance of an “on mission” mindset. The whole message could be summarized by the statement, “Life is a mission trip”. We saw how important it is that we see ourselves as always being “on duty” and ready for “divine encounters” that God arranges for those who are open and available. We saw how the first century church turned their world upside down (or maybe better stated “right-side up”) with the Gospel. The same Holy Spirit indwells us that indwelt them, and what He did almost 2,000 years ago, He can do today!

Last week, we began to focus on maturing disciples. We saw that maturity comes from what seems to the world a fanatical commitment to absorb the Scriptures into our lives. We looked at 1 Peter 1:23-2:3 and saw that the Word of God is to a disciple of Christ what milk is to a newborn baby. We dealt with how to develop or restore that ravenous appetite for the Word of God when it diminishes or even disappears. We are to read the Word, hear the Word, pray the Word into our lives, memorize the Word and meditate on the Word. Spiritual maturity for disciples of Jesus Christ always comes through taking in God’s Word.

Today, we are looking at three vital ingredients to a disciple’s spiritual maturity in conjunction with the Word of God.

I. Commit to a Local Church

When we are committed to follow Christ, we will be committed to a local church. When I was in college in the late 1960’s the Jesus movement was flourishing. One of the reasons that the Jesus movement never had the impact on culture that it could have had is that it was rejected by most evangelical churches. Because these young people didn’t look like the average church member and weren’t versed in “church lingo”, they were largely rejected by the churches. Because these “long haired hippie Jesus freaks” were by and large rejected by the established churches, they in turn by and large rejected the church. One of the cries that came out of the Jesus movement was “Jesus, YES! The Church, NO!” I am seeing an alarming return to that disdain for the organized, local church. Listen carefully to what I going to say. You cannot choose Jesus and reject the church, His bride. “The bride of Christ” is a common metaphor for the church (Matthew 25:1-13; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 21, 22). Suppose you came up to me and said, “Pastor I really love you, but I can’t stand your wife. I don’t want anything to do with her.” If you said that to me, I would not want anything to do with you! I would consider your “compliment” an insult. Listen carefully, it is foolish to think that we can love, follow and enjoy Christ apart from His bride, His body, the church. Let me show you how much Jesus identifies with His church.

When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the church, the Lord Jesus came to him on the Damascus road and said in **Acts 9:4b (NKJV)** "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Paul hadn't persecuted Jesus Himself, but Jesus is saying that He so loves His church that when you are against the church, you are against Him! The Bible tells us in **Ephesians 5:25b (NKJV)** "...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her". How can we treat lightly and refuse to be committed to that which Jesus loved and gave Himself for?

There are times in Scripture that the word "church" is used to refer to all those who are saved, to all who are His disciples. When Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18b (NKJV)** "...on this rock I will build My church..." But the local church is the manifestation of that universal church and at least 90 of the 114 references to the church in Scripture are referring to identifiable local churches. Even Jesus referred to specific local churches that He knew would be raised up when He was giving instructions for church discipline. Listen to what Jesus said to do when a sinning brother would not repent when confronted by a brother and then refused again when that brother came with two or three witnesses. **Matthew 18:17 (NKJV)** "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." That couldn't be the universal church. How would you tell the universal church? It was the specific local church that the sinning brother was a part of.

From the book of Acts, we also see that the early church had membership and membership records. When the Holy Spirit came upon the believers to unite them with Christ, indwell them, and fill them, Peter began to preach and we are told in **Acts 2:41 (NKJV)** "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*." Who is the "them" that was added to? It was the 120 persons in the upper room waiting for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:15). Now, after the Day of Pentecost, there were about 3,120! The point is that they had records; they kept track of individuals. Another line of evidence for church membership is that Christians were to submit to specific leaders. **Hebrews 13:17 (NKJV)** "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." Are you seeing the pattern?

The local church with identifiable membership is without a doubt taught in the New Testament. Joining a church has all of the qualities of a biblical covenant. A covenant is a commitment based on trust. "Covenant" is the language of personal relationship. Think of the most important commitments in your life and you will see that they are covenant commitments that involve the deepest personal relationships you have. In salvation, we commit ourselves in trust to Jesus Christ believing that He alone will save us. In addition to salvation, there is the covenant of marriage. Marriage is a commitment based on trust that we will love and cherish one another through sickness, health, poverty, and riches until death do us part. Marriage is called a covenant in Malachi 2:14. When we really understand the significance of joining a local church, we see that it has all the qualities of a biblical covenant. We have gone over the covenant with prospective new members for many years in the First Step Class, but a few years ago, we started asking them to sign a covenant document before joining.

I recognize that the local church is sometimes a messy place. It is made up of a group of saints who still struggle with that power of sin that dwells in our members. If you are committed to your church, I want to make you a promise. You will be hurt and disappointed, but that is true in most covenant relationships. Who is the husband or wife in a covenant marriage that has not been hurt by their spouse? Yet it is in the marriage that we learn to forgive and love even when we have been hurt. The same is true of the church. You will get hurt in the church you become a part of – guaranteed! Don't run away like an immature child. Those who are mature or want to gain maturity forgive, confront in love and grow from the injustice done. You may visit other churches and they seem so much more accepting, but I will guarantee you that it is just a matter of time until you are hurt there also.

There are some reasons to leave a church, but it should never be based on personal preferences, comfort, or "coolness", or running away from a problem. It should have to do with essential doctrines being denied or ignored, no equipping or focus on the mission (making disciples), or sin being ignored as a pattern.

Before I move to the next point, let me summarize what commitment to a local church should involve.

First, you should **join** a church that prioritizes the mission of making disciples. That would mean that the Word of God and the teaching of the Word are central. Is it a church that takes sin seriously and will confront you if you ever begin to excuse sin and drift away from God? Don't wait until you find a church where you agree with everything.

Joshua Harris in his excellent little book, *Stop Dating the Church*, gives 10 important questions to ask about a church before joining.

1. Is this a church where God's word is faithfully taught?
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Second, you make your church a priority. You repent of sitting in a pew and listening but never getting involved with making, maturing, or mobilizing disciples. The church has priority over sports, hunting season, and being on the lake. I am not talking about periodic getaways but a pattern of life.

Third, you find a place to serve. We will deal with that more in the next message as we focus on mobilizing disciples, but at this point, I would encourage you to find the disciple making ministry that God has gifted you for and given you a passion for.

Fourth, invest heavily in the church you join in the area of finances. We do not teach a legalistic view of tithing, but we believe that tithing is a great place to start. If tithing was required under the law, then grace always joyfully does more than the letter of the law required. The tithe is a reminder to you and a testimony to your family and others that all that you have belongs to God.

A vital ingredient of maturing as a disciple of Jesus Christ is to commit to a local church.

II. Embrace Suffering

This ingredient for maturity probably caught you by surprise. Next to being committed to a local church, this one is the most important ingredient. There is no tool that God uses more to mature disciples than suffering. **1 Peter 5:10 (NKJV)** "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*." I submit to you that those 4 words, "perfect", "establish", "strengthen", and "settle" describe maturity in a disciple's life. Let's look at these 4 words and see how God brings these qualities into our life through all kinds of suffering.

A. Perfect

That word is translated "restore" in other translations. The Greek word literally means to mend or make fit for use. It was used of setting a broken bone or mending a fishing net so that it could be used for catching fish as it was intended. God uses suffering to mature us by preparing us for the life ministry He has for us. There are some things that God has for us to do that we will never be fit for until God allows suffering in our lives.

B. Establish

That word means to be put on a solid foundation or to be grounded. Trials and suffering ground us in what is really important. When we submit to the suffering God allows in our life, it grounds us so that we are not tossed to and fro with every wind that blows through culture. Those who are the most established and grounded disciples are those who have suffered most and responded with submission to the Lord that allowed the suffering.

C. Strengthen

Just as physical exercise strengthens our physical muscles, suffering strengthens our faith and thus brings spiritual maturity. All of this is canceled if we bow up our neck and harden our heart when suffering comes. When we submit to what God has allowed, we grow in maturity and strengthen in our walk with Him.

D. Settle

This Greek word means to make firm and steadfast. Just like a tree with deep roots stands firm in the fiercest of storms, suffering causes us to put down deep roots in our confidence in God's sovereignty. When we respond correctly to trials and suffering, our roots go deep.

God always uses suffering to mature disciples of Jesus Christ – always. It may be physical, emotional, suffering that is obvious to all or suffering that is not seen by others but very real. God could stop all suffering, but He doesn't because it is suffering that God uses to mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

III. Strive for Fellowship

Sometimes teachers and writers use the word "community" instead of fellowship and I have no problem with that terminology. This is the area that I hear more criticism of this church in than any other. I hear things like, "It is really hard to connect" or "I'm having a problem making friends" or "I just don't seem to fit in". I am not making excuses, because every church including this one could be much better in this realm of community or stewardship. A lot of the problem is the times in which we live. We are an independent and isolated people. Most value privacy over community. Tony Evans gives a good description of most churches today. "If your church is anything like the typical church, it contains people who believe that if they arrive on Sunday morning in time to hear the sermon, they have met their weekly Christian requirement. They showed up, the preacher showed up, God showed up – and everyone went home happy. People who practice this kind of Christianity fail to understand the nature of the church and the nature of the faith they profess. Being a disciple means far more than listening to sermons or attending Bible studies, just taking in the truth. The problem with this is that proclamation without fellowship leads to dead orthodoxy. It is truth with no life. On the other hand, fellowship without the proclamation of the truth leads to empty sentimentalism. This is 'touchy-feely' religion with nothing to touch or feel. Some people say, 'Our church preaches the Word.' Other people say, 'Well our church loves people'. If a church can't say it does both, it is a lopsided congregation." [Tony Evans, *What Matters Most*, page 153-154]. **Genuine fellowship or community (*Koinonia* in the Greek) involves partnership in a common life (Christ's life), a common purpose (the glory of God), a common love (to love the Lord the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves), and a common mission (make disciples of all people groups). This partnership includes a sharing of friendship, truth, encouragement, and even material possessions when there is a need. Biblical fellowship at its essence is not an activity; it is a relationship.**

Here is what I want to say about fellowship. You must strive for it! You must be intentional about it. Stop waiting others to take the initiative, and you take it instead. Get in a small group. If you are already in a small group, invite someone over to your home. Sit by someone new and get to know them. Genuine biblical community is worth striving for. Disciples do not see fellowship or community as optional. It is vital for maturity.

CONCLUSION

Are you a maturing disciple? Are you committed to a local church? Are you embracing the suffering that God has allowed in your life? Are you striving for fellowship? It's time for action.