

The Way of Jesus

Week 13 - How Spiritual Change Happens

Part 1

Key Verse

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

Go, therefore to every ethnic group and help them to become my students.

Matthew 28.19 (DW)

Key Term: Disciple

“The disciple or apprentice of Jesus is one who has firmly decided to learn from him how to lead his or her life, whatever that may be, as Jesus himself would do it.” (DC p. 291)

“As a disciple of Jesus I am with him, by choice and by grace, learning from him how to live in the Kingdom of God... learning from him how to lead my life as he would lead my life if he were I...” (DC p. 283)

Who Is Our Teacher? (SG p 90 ff)

Each person is a student of a few crucial people. (p. 272) Look at the list in the SG on p.90. What three or four people have you been students of in your life?

As a disciple, I learn ‘from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I’ (p.283). Look at the list on SG p.91. Ponder how Jesus might live your life if he were you...

How might Jesus live his life if he were... (see list on SG p. 92)

Look at the list comparing a "Pharisee-Style Christian" with an "Apprentice-to-Jesus-Style Christian" on SG pp 92-93. Discuss.

Video Vignette With Dallas Willard: "Spiritual Change: The Reliable Pattern"

One of the things that strike you when you open the Gospels and you look at Jesus and the people who were responding to him is how much joy was there. The amazing generosity of Jesus stands out everywhere. Whoever came to Jesus with a need was met by the response, "Yes, of course." "If you wanted," the little leper said, "you could heal me." "And I do want to," Jesus said. And he put his hands out and took him in. The generosity of the kingdom. Jesus operated from the understanding of how great God was and how available he was, and he came to bring us that message and to bring us into that.

And what Jesus shows is that real change is possible. You don't have to live the way that most of us see around us and have experienced ourselves—in hopelessness, fear, impotence, not having a very loving attitude toward ourselves and others, but always thinking, how am I going to manage this?

And all of sin comes in that way. It tempts us to think that we have to reach out and grab things and control them. No wonder the human situation is hopeless then.

What we want to think as we listen to Jesus is that things really can be different. We can be different. The sense that we really are our own worst enemies can pass as we watch Jesus take over our lives and begin to change all of those dimensions.

We have in this culture something that used to be known as "miserable sinner" Christianity, which is just the idea that no matter how far you go you really always remain the same. You can't really change. Many people actually believe that and think that [it] glorifies God to say we are still just as bad as we ever were. That's not what Jesus had in mind, or Paul. It goes against all the wonderful progressions in Scripture such as Romans 5, or Colossians 3, or 2 Peter 1, where [Paul and Peter] talk about moving from faith to a life that is pervaded by love, through the Holy Spirit, and through the word growing in [the person of a believer].

We grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean to just grow in forgiveness, but to grow so that everything you do is a product of grace that is received. It isn't the sinner that burns a lot of grace;

it is the saint. Saints burn grace like a 747 on takeoff. Everything they are doing is an act of grace.

There is a general pattern to how we change. Look at the diagram. I use the word VIM. It is actually a Latin word.

When you think of the V, think of vision. You have to have a vision if you are going to change. No matter what it concerns. It need not just be in things we consider religious. Illustration: learning to speak a language. Our schools are almost universal failures in teaching languages, and the reason is the lack of a vision for the goodness of speaking the language. All over this world people learn to speak English with almost no equipment. But they really have a vision for the goodness of learning to speak English.

And they intend it. That's what the "I" stands for. Intention. This is where we are most lacking, having the intention to become serious disciples, apprentices of Jesus. Our religion has separated being a Christian from being a disciple. It permits you to be a Christian forever, without ever becoming a disciple of Jesus. This has deep historical roots. But the fact of the matter is [that] we don't have discipleship evangelism. We don't evangelize people to become disciples. And we don't have programs with Jesus Christ as teacher. In fact, many folks feel uneasy about talking about Jesus as teacher because they think it is just cut-down language to say Jesus is only a human teacher. Some are afraid of this because they think it emphasizes the humanness of Jesus.

But if you don't have a teacher, what else do you not have? You don't have disciples. Jesus as teacher must come back so that we can have the intention to learn from him and do all the things he said, by becoming a different person.

And this brings us to the M in VIM, which is the means. We are long on means but short on vision and intention. And without vision and intention, the means don't work.

There are many ways we can illustrate this, but perhaps the best model is the AA model, one of the clearest illustrations of the VIM pattern. There's more to being a Christian than being sober, but this is an outstanding application of the VIM model. But if your issue is sobriety, you need something that works. AA models vision, intention, and means.

We can go deeper than that. We can see at the spiritual level a transformation that can move us into a deeper world than anything like AA can give. We must keep in mind that discipleship should not be designed to change behavior. The principle here is one of indirection. Christian transformation is not designed to teach or focus on behavior.

You change the soul, you change the mind, you change the inner person; and the behavior follows indirectly. If we focus on the behavior, that will put the focus on willpower and take us to legalism, with an infusion of grace every now and then. The secret is not trying; that will throw us back into legalism and put the emphasis on willpower, with a little infusion of grace now and then. It isn't trying, it's training. And training transforms all those dimensions of the self so that instead of trying to keep the law, we become the type of person for whom keeping the law is the most natural thing for us to do.

Readings for Next Week:

Read The Divine Conspiracy, 291-299 again.

1. Ask to see Jesus in the Gospels, and also throughout history as the upholder of the universe.
2. Use every means at your disposal to come to see him more fully.
3. Decide to make it your life's intention to learn from Jesus how to live your life as he would live your life if he were you – to be his apprentice

Read The Divine Conspiracy, 300 – end of chapter.

Read Study Guide pp 94-97