

The Disciplines of Giving and Serving
Titus 3: 3-8, 2 Corinthians 8:1-11

Friends have you ever thought about who you are going to become in the next five years, ten years, or thirty years from now?

And I'm not talking about what kind of job you will be doing, or whether you will still be working in your current profession...

I'm talking about the kind of person you are going to become in respect to your character, your integrity, your personality, your values...

In five years from now will you become more honest, more loving and kind-hearted, more trustworthy? Will you put less value on things and more value on relationships?

In ten years from now will you become more cynical, more skeptical, more pragmatic and utilitarian? Will you be more introverted and withdrawn or more forceful and demanding?

And in thirty years from now will you be satisfied with who you have become or will you regret the person you have turned into?

We've all had encounters with certain people who make us say *"you know... I hope I can be like you when I'm your age!"* or instead whisper to a friend *"If I end up like that one day – please shoot me before I can inflict myself on too many people"*

Because the truth is friends that we will change over time – whether we choose to or not, we will change – life changes us.

The most obvious evidence of that is biological – we get older and we mature and then our bodies start aging, our hair turns grey or we start losing it, we get aches and pains in new places we didn't know existed, and we start to forget the places we knew existed.

When you are a teenager you think you are immortal, when you are a middle ager your mortality starts to catch up with you – and that changes you.

And as we get older and life goes by we start to accumulate experiences, we have relationships, marriages, and we become parents, grandparents...

Before I became a parent, as a young idealistic Christian I denounced all the gender stereotypes and superficiality that Barbie Dolls represented, there was no way I'd ever buy Barbies for my kid – and then I had a little girl and things changed!

And even though I said I'm not talking about what you do for work and careers – think back to where you first started out when you entered the workforce and how over time you worked your way to where you are now.

If you were promoted, and gained more responsibility in your work, that often changes your attitude towards your work and

your coworkers. And if you didn't get promoted... well that can certainly change your attitude towards work and your boss as well.

And though we might not like to admit it, our money, our wealth, our possessions and the social status that goes along with it also changes us.

I mean when I was a young adult working night shift at a manufacturing plant – I was perfectly fine with driving an older affordable car – like a Dodge Shadow.

Now that I'm in my forties, the minister of a vibrant growing church in a wealthy suburb of Calgary and my earning potential is considerably greater than before – whether I like it or not, it has influenced and changed my perspective on what kind of car I think I should drive – I want something a bit more sporty and powerful, so I have a Dodge Avenger!

And ladies, as you probably know – men change when they get behind the wheel of their car... They might be nice and

polite and respectful everywhere else – but if their vehicle has a bit of power, they turn into Mario Andretti when they drive somewhere – maybe this is true for some of you ladies too...

Friends, the truth is that there are all sorts of things that change us - whether we like it or not... and given the pervasive and subtle effect that Sin has on this world and on our lives... unless there is another power at work on us – the changes that life works on our character, our beliefs, our personality, our values.... will be for the worse.

And thirty years from now we might now like the person we've turned into...

And we are not exempt from this simply because we are followers of Christ, and neither are those whom we disciple.

In fact one of the biggest mistakes that we can make in discipling others is neglecting to help them to develop the discipleship disciplines which protect us from being changed for the worst.

We may have passed on the heart of discipleship to them, and they have experience what it means to be saved by Grace alone, connect with Jesus by Faith alone, stand on Scripture alone, put their trust in Christ alone... and then we pretty much leave them alone.

And we hope that somehow they'll figure out this whole 'following Christ thing' on their own.

So that in five, ten, thirty years from now they'll have grown into a wonderful mature Christian – they kind of person that makes others say *"wow - I hope I'm like you when I'm your age!"*

But we neglect to give them some specific practices and disciplines which they can utilize to help them actually grow into that.

You see friends, without teaching people how to form their lives around discipleship disciplines – they will gradually and

ever so slowly and subtly change for the worse as life happens to them - even though they believe in Jesus.

If life is hard and difficult – they will become discouraged and cynical in their faith. If life is good and full of blessings – they will become complacent and self-righteous in their faith.

Now again – don't misunderstand me here. I'm not trying to say that the bottom line for our faith and salvation and living our Christian lives ultimately rests on our efforts or abilities – that would be totally contrary to everything we learned last month in the 5 Solas.

What I am saying is that the Heart of discipleship has to be given a means of being lived out and expressed and that we need to be intentional and consistent - disciplined - in doing so...

Or the Heart of discipleship and our Faith starts to shrink and loose vitality – and might even get to a point where it could be questioned if we truly ever had that Heart to begin with.

Disconcerting stuff - I know...

But the good news is that Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of our faith, and Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us to *“fix our eyes on him as we run this race that is set before us.”*

And this race of which the scripture speaks is not a 100m sprint – it is a marathon, a test of endurance, and focus and... discipline.

And friends I want to tell you this morning that the best way to keep your eyes on Christ...

The best way to discipline yourself to do this as you run this marathon of life...

The best way to keep the challenges and the fatigue from changing your character, attitude, beliefs and values for the worse so that you finish well instead...

The best way to do this- is to develop the disciplines of giving and serving.

So, the key phrases in our two scripture passages this morning are *“devote themselves to doing good”* Titus 3:8, and *“see also that you excel in the grace of giving”* 2 Cor 8:7

And friends what I want to show you this morning is how expressing the Heart of discipleship through intentional, consistent serving and giving will keep you focused on Christ because it is how Christ served and gave himself to us.

So let’s look at Titus 3:8 where Paul says to Titus, the Bishop of the Island of Crete;

“I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

Now what exactly are the “things” that Paul wants Titus to emphasize which are excellent and profitable for everyone?

Well, in the previous two chapters Paul has given Titus some guidance on how he should instruct the Christians of the island to discipline themselves to live differently, than how they had lived before they received the Grace of God.

Because as Paul writes, the Grace of God *“teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”* (Titus 2:12)

For those who lead the church Paul writes *“Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.”* (Titus 1:7)

And to the rest of those who have now become part of God’s household – he gives advice on how that means they should live in their own households.

“Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.” (Titus 2:2)

“Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.” (Titus 2:3)

“Urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands” (Titus 2:4-5)

“Encourage the young men to be self-controlled.” (Titus 2:6)

“Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted” (Titus 2:9-10)

So Paul wants Titus to emphasize these things because these things are good and profitable for everyone; in how they

illustrate specific ways that we can serve each other and also how they reflect who someone has become.

There are good values, characteristics, personality traits and so on reflected here.

But, more importantly Paul wants Titus to do so because these things are grounded in the details of the gospel – which is all about how Christ served us.

So in verses 3 to 7, which we read this morning, Paul reiterates to Titus that they are serving the people of Crete by instructing them how to serve each other because they (Paul & Titus) also at one time did not know how to live this way.

Paul says we used to be *“foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.” (Titus 3:3)*

But, he continues, God *“saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy”* (Titus 3:5) and so that *“justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”* (Titus 3:7)

So – all of the behavioral changes that Paul wants Titus to emphasize to the Cretans, as he serves them and discipled them as their Church leader - they all flow out of how God has saved Paul and Titus in Jesus Christ and how the Holy Spirit has changed them and how this has happened to the Cretan Christians as well too!

So when Paul says *“emphasize these things”* he not only means the specific ways in which Christians on Crete ought to conduct themselves to serve each other; but also how that specifically reflects the way in which Christ has served us.

Friends, the discipline of serving each other is less about aping the exact things which Paul told the Cretans to do, and more about living out the heart of how Christ served us.

We must discipline ourselves and those we disciple to ensure that the Servant heart of Christ is reflected in how we relate to each other, with those who live around us, and whoever else God may bring across our path as we are running this race.

And we reflect this through serving in the following ways.

First, we serve in humility.

Just as Christ left the glory of His divinity behind to become human so we stoop to serve others by doing things which are menial, degrading, unrewarding or unnoticed. (Phil 2:5-8)

Secondly, we serve those who are undeserving.

Since Christ died for us while we were still sinners and did not deserve to be forgiven, our service must go beyond serving those who deserve it. We must intentionally seek out and serve those whom the world determines unworthy – and help them anyways. That is grace! (Romans 5:8)

Thirdly, we serve in the truth, because the truth is that we needed to be saved by Christ to be delivered from sin, even if we couldn't see this or weren't willing to admit it.

Christ knew this and served us by speaking the truth in love – we must serve others by speaking the truth in love. (John 8:23)

Forth, we must persist in serving when our service is rejected.

Even though many people rejected Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, Jesus still went ahead and offered his life on the cross for them anyways.

Eventually God's irresistible and persistent grace would break down their resistance and win them over. The apostle Paul knew this from personal experience (Acts 9)

And so, as Christ had sacrificed his life to forgive Paul, Paul now sacrificed his life to serve as the Apostle to the Gentiles, even if they didn't want him at first.

And that's the fifth way we serve others - sacrificially, even if they don't want it at first. And remember that sacrificial means it will cost us something. (John 15:13)

Maybe it costs us our pride to continue to serve when we are rejected.

Maybe it costs us time to continue and persist, or it might cost us our reputation, or perhaps it will cost us money – but that is how we serve others, through sacrificial giving.

And there is no better example of a group of Christians who did this than the Macedonian Church.

And the second scripture passage we read this morning is where Paul is writing to the Corinthian Church and boasting about how the Macedonian Christians.

He describes how they were so eager to give money to help any of the Lord's people who were in need – that they pleaded with him for the opportunity to do this.

And this is amazing because they themselves, as Paul notes, were undergoing difficult circumstances and extreme poverty! (2 Cor 8:2)

But in spite of that they *“gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own ...”*

And then Paul gives us a clue as to why the Macedonians were so eager, almost desperate to participate in this benevolent ministry.

And that’s because as Paul says *“They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”*

In other words friends, the Macedonians were only been able to give a sacrificial financial gift out of their poverty and hardship because they had been trained to serve others in the way that Christ has served us – right?

They gave themselves first of all to the Lord... discipleship disciplines, and then by the will of God also to us – the sacrificial giving Paul is commending them for.

And when you read about these Macedonians Christians – don’t you go “wow, I hope that someday I can be like you as well!”

That’s the kind of person I want to become.

The kind that is able to plead for the privilege of sharing in the service of the Lord’s people – even when I’m in the midst of financial hardship or extremely challenging circumstances.

Friends, my prayer is that the Holy Spirit inspires us to become the kind of person that Paul challenges the Corinthians to be – the kind that excels in the grace of giving.

And be encouraged friends – God’s promise to us this morning is that if we will make the commitment to being intentional and disciplined about finding ways to regularly and

consistently serve and give so that we reflect how Christ served us...

Then as we run this race set before us, serving and giving truly will help us to become more like Christ, and to excel in the grace of giving.

And this is a promise we can count on because Jesus Christ has started our salvation through his service and he will complete our salvation through his gift of the Holy Spirit.

So if there is anything to give thanks for this weekend - let us give thanks for Jesus Christ, and how He enables us by the power of His Holy Spirit to grow in Him by reflecting His service and giving in how we give and serve others.

Give thanks for who He is helping you to become – One of his disciple who is becoming disciplined in serving and giving.

Amen