

A Disciple's Manifesto



C.C.I. Fenn

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Disciples or Churchmembers?

Jesus left the early church with a rather simple mission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”¹

Wait. Go back and read that again. Read it again, because in my experience, if you've been a Christian for very long at all you've probably heard and read that statement enough that you know what it says. But I sometimes think we've forgotten what it means. I don't think we're really paying attention to Jesus' words here.

Think about the way Christians talk about evangelism and discipleship:

“Have you invited Jesus into your heart?”

“Why not just lay your all on the altar tonight?”

“Do you know where you'd go if you died?”

“Have you ever prayed the sinner's prayer?

Would you like to?”

Or my personal (least) favorite, “With heads bowed and eyes closed, I'd like to invite anyone who is feeling a little tug at your heart to raise your hand and accept Jesus tonight - don't worry, no one's looking.”

¹ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Mt 28:19–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Where did this talk come from and why has it become the only way we talk about entering the Kingdom?

Why are we more concerned with getting someone to come down to an altar or pray one prayer than we are in seeing them steadily grow over weeks, months, and years in the “grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”² Maybe it's just one more symptom of our ‘gotta-have-it-now’ culture. Perhaps it's rooted in the way scripture was written - with only the most important, crisis moments recorded. Or it could be a combination of different things all jumbled together, keeping our focus on one moment and away from a life lived.

I don't know the reasons but the longer I've been around pop-Christianity, the more I think we've ignored Jesus' last and greatest command: Go, Baptize, Teach.

Are most Christians - and most churches - really making a priority of teaching everything that Jesus commanded?

Where did Jesus talk about altars in the Gospels?

When did he tell anyone that they needed to pray a ‘sinner's prayer’?

At what point in his ministry did he stare out at a crowd and ask, “Anyone here want me to come into your heart? Why don't you all close your eyes and bow your heads so no one has to be ashamed of

² The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (2 Pe 3:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

asking?”

It didn't happen.

He was too busy teaching his followers things like, “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”³

In other words, Jesus taught people how to live. He showed them how to think. He worked to build habits in their lives. And through it all, he was laying a foundation that they could erect their entire lives upon.

Jesus never said, “Ask me into your heart.”

But he did say, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”⁴

As Christians, and churches, we need to do more building over the long-haul and less searching for the one crisis moment that will change everything.

Crisis moments don't make long-term, stable Christians anymore than one bag of Quikrete will make a solid foundation for your home.

There is a better way.

King Jesus

So, if Jesus' main concern isn't asking him into our hearts, what is it?

We could get into all kinds of theological discussions at this point but for now I want to keep it simple: Jesus is King. We need to act like it.

Is there more to it than this? Absolutely!

Is there less? No way.

Christianity is about growing, day by day, in the grace and knowledge of King Jesus.

We grow in his grace through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, baptism, the Lord's Supper, fasting, scripture reading and memorization, fellowship, feet-washing, and more. God communicates himself and his grace through these seemingly simple acts. And as we grow in grace, we learn to rely on him. We learn to trust him with more and more of our lives. We learn to hope in him and find our satisfaction in him. His life orients and reorients our lives, day by day. Through this grace, our hearts are formed.

We grow in the knowledge of Jesus by learning - studying the scriptures or other books, listening to sermons or podcasts, or taking classes on biblical Greek or Hebrew. In this learning, God shapes and molds our minds so that we begin to think like him. As we're faced with situations or challenges, our initial reaction becomes less like us and more like Jesus. We suddenly find ourselves doing and saying things that we previously would never have done or said. Through this knowledge, our minds are

³ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Mt 5:39–42). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁴ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Mt 7:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

formed.

Unfortunately, working towards the twin goals of growing in grace and knowledge hasn't always been easy. We can go to church, but listening to a 30-45 minute sermon on a random biblical text can only do so much. If your church has small groups you can attend those but, again, an hour here and there probably isn't going to be life-altering.

The fact is, if you do everything your church provides, you're probably only going to be engaged in the things that will help you grow for 3-5 hours per week...and that's out of 168 hours. To put things in perspective, according to a recent study the average American watches five hours of television per day.⁵ *Per day*. If we continue down this path - giving our faith a couple hours every week and our favorite TV shows a couple hours per day - it won't be surprising when our perspectives, attitudes, and habits are shaped more by *Game of Thrones* or *Empire* than by God.

Since time spent at church can't do it all, what can be done?

It's up to you.

You have to learn how to memorize scripture and do word studies. You need to scour Amazon or your local bookstore for the best Christian books, while you hope that you aren't picking up a dud or worse, heresy. You have to figure out which commentaries are worth buying if you want to study further into the text. You have to find the best

resources on theology, history, and biblical studies. You have to figure out fasting and prayer and everything in between. You have to do it all.

Or do you? What if there was a plan for growing in grace and knowledge? What if you had an outline that you could follow that would walk you through this plan, day by day? What if theology was accessible, understandable, and actually enjoyable? What if growing in grace and knowledge was no longer a chore? What if it was just as easy and entertaining as turning on your TV?

Where do I go from here?

The technical term for "growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus" is 'discipleship.' When we come to Jesus, acknowledge how we've rebelled against him in the past, and recognize him as King, we become his disciples. We begin a lifetime journey of growth that will lead us to look and sound more and more like him. I want to help you on this journey - I can't walk it for you, but I can provide all of the resources possible to make sure you reach your destination.

If you're reading this, I'm going to assume that you're already a Christian - you've bowed your knee to the King, confessed your rebellion, and begun walking with God - even if it's only been a little while. I want to challenge you right now to do three things.

⁵ Hinckley, D. (2014, March 5). Average American watches 5 hours of TV per day. Retrieved December 17, 2015, from <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/average-american-watches-5-hours-tv-day-article-1.1711954>

1 - Make a commitment

Christianity is not a hobby. When Jesus first approached potential disciples, he gave them one command: “Follow me.” Jesus faced a lot of excuses as he asked for this kind of total commitment:

“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”⁶

“I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”⁷

On the other hand, some committed. Matthew records that when faced with these words, “Follow me,” Peter and Andrew “immediately..left their nets and followed him.”⁸ That was commitment. And even after Peter had denied Jesus three times, he realized his fault and reoriented his life back toward Jesus.

The only way that you’re going to see real growth in grace and knowledge is by making a commitment to grow. This commitment may include specific goals such as ‘I commit to read 3 chapters of the Bible per day’ or ‘I commit to spending at least 5 minutes in prayer per day’ or it may just be a general commitment to growth but it needs to be made and it needs to be written down.

You may ask, ‘Does this really need to be written down?’

Yes. It does.

According to research that’s been done at Dominican University in California, “you are 42

6 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Lk 9:59). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

7 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Lk 9:61). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

8 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Mt 4:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

percent more likely to achieve your goals just by writing them down.”⁹ By writing this commitment down, you are moving it from the ethereal world of your brain into concrete reality. It’s a small way to remind yourself of the importance of this commitment and keep yourself accountable.

Before you do anything else, commit.

2 - Find a church

In the past this may have been a given but we’re living in an increasingly individualistic culture and it’s become quite popular to assume we don’t really need the Church in order to be Christians. [I believe Jesus and Paul would both disagree.](#)

When Jesus commissioned his disciples and sent them out, he did so two-by-two (see Mark 6:7). He recognized the value in growing and working together. Likewise, Paul wrote to a divided church and compared them to a body: “But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”¹⁰ In other words, we need one another.

If you’re going to grow in grace and knowledge, you need a church. There are some things you

9 Hyatt, M. (2014, January 3). 5 Reasons Why You Should Commit Your Goals to Writing. Retrieved December 17, 2015, from <http://michaelhyatt.com/5-reasons-why-you-should-commit-your-goals-to-writing.html>

10 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (1 Co 12:18–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

simply cannot do alone. You can't baptize yourself. Fellowship can't occur unless there's someone to fellowship with. And communion loses part of its meaning if done in isolation.

Others also help temper our beliefs - they keep us from falling into heresy - and they keep us accountable to the commitments that we've made.

I'll say it once more: You cannot grow in grace and knowledge as you ought to by having your entire Christian experience through the internet.

You need a church.

Find one.

3 - Grow in Grace

Growth in grace does not come automatically. We aren't automatically infused with all of the divine grace we'll ever need at the moment of salvation and we don't receive more by being passive. Growth in grace requires us to build habits and live into something bigger than ourselves - the life of Christ. Over the past two millennia, Christians have scoured the Bible to find ways that God communicates his grace to us. These ways are rooted deeply in the Christian tradition and have been tested and tried by believers going all of the way back to the first century, and before. If we are going to truly grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, then our lives must be characterized by these practices.

Prayer

Without prayer, everything else in the spiritual life is vain. If scripture reading isn't bathed in prayer, all you're doing is reading words on a page. If fasting isn't performed in prayer, all you're doing is starving yourself. Prayer is the vital link that connects us to God and breathes life into every other spiritual practice. If we are not leading lives of prayer, we are not leading spiritual lives.

As we read through the Bible, we find prayer at the center of the spiritual life. Jesus often separated himself from the crowds, even his disciples, and spent time alone in prayer. Abraham's, Moses', and David's lives were all characterized by regular prayer. In addition, the early church often prayed both individually and corporately as described throughout the book of Acts. Prayer is one of the primary ways that God communicates himself, his will, and his grace to us.

One of the things that's important to note is that there is much variety in prayer. Prayer can be silent or spoken. It can be recited from memory or spoken spontaneously. It can be done while standing, kneeling, sitting, or lying down - with eyes opened or closed. It can take the form of praise, petition, confession, and more. It isn't a magical formula or a form of incantation. Prayer is communicating with the Divine. All of the forms mentioned above, and many, many others, are valid forms of prayer and have their place. The important thing isn't the form - it's the fact. We must develop habits of prayer if we

are to grow in grace. Prayer is the spiritual glue that holds our lives together.

Scripture Reading & Memorization

The author of Hebrews described God's word as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."¹¹ Scripture has the power to show us where we've gone wrong like nothing else on earth. It speaks to our very hearts and through it, God gives us grace and encouragement. Jesus himself recognized the superlative importance of valuing scripture when he rebuked Satan by quoting Deuteronomy, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."¹² Our spiritual lives are nourished by consuming God's Word.

This happens first through the practice of scripture reading. This isn't indepth study or analysis - it's merely the devotional reading of God's Word with the goal of hearing from him. We can accomplish this by reading through books, a chapter or two at a time, following a lectionary or other Bible reading plan, or opening up to the book with the most interesting name. The most important thing is that you take your time and allow yourself to really soak in only one or two passages or chapters. Read, then re-read. Meditate on every word - every

11 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Heb 4:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

12 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Mt 4:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

phrase - every thought. If you will begin reading this way, looking for God to communicate through his written word, he will speak grace into your heart and life.

Another way that we can receive the grace of God through scripture is by hiding it in our hearts. Psalm 119 is a psalm of praise to God for his word. In it, David sings about the importance of treasuring the scriptures and internalizing them in such a way that they actually change us. In verse 11, he writes, "I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you."¹³ Here, David recognizes an important truth of spiritual growth - as we take the word of God in and make it a part of who we are, we give it the power to transform us. Memorizing scripture isn't just for those who have excellent memories or for students in Christian schools that require it. Memorizing scripture is one of the primary ways in which we grow in grace.

Fasting

Although fasting is seldom discussed within much of modern, American Christianity, it is a discipline that was practiced by nearly all of the Biblical heroes of the faith. Moses, Daniel, Esther, David, Solomon, Elijah, Peter, and Jesus all fasted along with many others throughout the Bible. Isaiah gave instructions on the kind of fast that honored (and was honored by) God and Jesus preached on fasting in the Sermon on the Mount. And it

13 The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Ps 119:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

didn't end with Jesus. Fasting has continued to be important throughout Christian history. John Wesley and the early Methodists were known to fast twice a week. Fasting has not lost its value.

When we fast, it reminds us that our sustenance isn't just the food we eat or the air we breathe. Real life is a gift from God and must be appreciated as such. Fasting keeps us dependent on God. It's also a practice that helps us learn self-discipline - it's one of the ways that we can keep our human desires in check. When allowed to run wild, our fleshly desires will consume us. Regular fasting helps us to master the sin that's crouching at our doors, ready to strike.

In addition to this, fasting is one of the best things we can do when we feel as though there's nothing else we can do. Jesus once found his disciples unable to cast out a particularly stubborn demon. After doing what they could not, Jesus informed his disciples, "But this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting."¹⁴ Fasting, when accompanied by fervent prayer, gives us the dependence on God we need to accomplish the impossible.

Other Practices

Prayer, scripture reading, and fasting are not the only ways that we grow in grace but they are some of the most fundamental. Before we can move on to other, just as important practices, we must

¹⁴ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

allow these to become habits in our lives. Once they have become such a part of who we are that we no longer have to force ourselves to do them, we should move on to other spiritual disciplines such as giving, Sabbath, witnessing, and others. Together, these practices build us up in our faith and give us what we need to grow in the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

4 - Grow in Knowledge

Too often, Christians focus all of their energy on growing in grace without acknowledging that it's equally important to grow in knowledge. Although opponents of God may argue that faith relies on ignorance - the opposite is true. True knowledge - knowledge that is rooted in God and based on the reality God has created - is of the utmost importance for the Christian. God warned against rejecting knowledge as revealed by him when he spoke through the prophet Hosea to the Kingdom of Israel: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me."¹⁵ Many in Israel believed ignorance was bliss. God didn't agree. If we are to love God with all of our minds, we must see the value in learning and we must give ourselves over to the growth of the mind as well as the heart.

¹⁵ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Ho 4:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Theology

Theology. It's a scary word to a lot of Christians but it doesn't need to be. In fact, you probably do theology a lot more often than you realize. Every time you make a statement like "God is good" or "He is risen" you are engaging in theology. Your theology may be unorganized and intuitive but there's no doubt that it affects the way you think, speak, and act. This is why consciously choosing to grow in our knowledge of theology is an important pursuit.

Theology is not a vain rattling of the mind. It directly shapes our actions. Since theology forces us to confront our underlying assumptions and beliefs about the most important questions of life (Who is God? What is man? What is the meaning of life? What happens when we die? etc.), we're given the chance to see whether we have right or wrong beliefs. In turn, we'll see whether our actions have been grounded in firm, truthful doctrine or the shifting sand of falsehood. Our actions matter; our beliefs do too; theology helps us examine both.

In addition, theology can be a spiritual pursuit. Theology is the way we learn about God. In it, we hear the stories of his past, we listen to his aspirations, he comforts our fears, and we're led into hours in his presence as we meditate on him. Love for God should create a desire to know him more and theology helps us in that pursuit. James encourages us to "Draw near to God, and he will

draw near to you."¹⁶ Theology is one way we can do just that. It is the natural response to falling in love with the Lord of Glory.

History

For many people, the word 'history' conjures up images of dry lectures and boring textbooks with little connection to the real world as it is today. Though this may have been your experience with history in school, learning about Christian history is a highly valuable pursuit that every believer should engage in. Understanding where we came from helps us to see where we are and where we are going.

It's easy for us to get tunnel vision as Christians. We too often fall into the rut of seeing everything through the lens of one local church and forget that God's Church is universal. One of the things that has always stuck out to me when reading the Revelation is the universal nature of God's church. John paints a picture of every tongue, nation, tribe, and people joining together in reverent worship of God. As we read Christian history, we're reminded that God is bigger than 'The First Whatever Church of Wherever.' It is there that we get a glimpse of God's work in places like Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. This kind of study helps us to put our problems in perspective and keeps us humble by reminding us that we are not the church alone. Our brothers and sisters in Christ extend all over the

¹⁶ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Jas 4:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

world and throughout time. This story is God's story. We're just blessed to play a bit part now and again.

In addition to seeing the broader picture of God's story, studying Christian history also helps us deal with current problems. A couple of years ago, I read short biographies of Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna along with some of their writings. One of the things that I noted as I read was how Ignatius faced persecution. He saw every trial and painful experience as an opportunity to join himself to Christ. It reminded me of Paul's reference to the "sharing of [Christ's] sufferings."¹⁷ I hadn't thought much about suffering as a form of discipleship until I read Ignatius' biography.

When I broke my leg later that summer, I was reminded of Ignatius' words and happily used my immobility to dive deeper into the word of God. I wasn't experiencing the kind of intense suffering that the early Christians in Ignatius' day were but his words struck a chord with me and helped me deal with a problem I was forced to face. As we enter into the lives of believers who have experienced success, disappointment, persecution, fame, loss, health, sickness, death, and everything in between, we can learn how to live well. Note what worked, note what didn't and adjust our lives accordingly.

Biblical Studies

The Bible is a book unlike any other book. It's been said that it is simple enough for a child to wade

¹⁷ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Php 3:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

in but deep enough for a scholar to drown in. When we first encounter God through his word, we may have a limited understanding of it, the words it uses, the cultural context into which those words were written, and the human authors God inspired to put pen to paper. There's nothing wrong with ignorance. But there is something wrong when we choose to remain in ignorance in spite of opportunities to pull ourselves out. As Christians, it isn't enough for us to merely read the scriptures devotionally, we must study them.

If we are going to more fully understand what God is trying to communicate through his word, it's important that we do everything in our power to understand him. This means that we need to grow in our knowledge of the Bible's authors, its locales, its cultures, and its languages. We need to make a priority of learning these things and not assume that it's only important for pastors or scholars to give themselves to such subjects. We don't have to learn to read Hebrew or Greek fluently to benefit from diving deeper than what we find in our Bible study notes. Every Christian should find a value in learning how to better interpret and understand the Bible.

How we can help...

At the end of this e-book, I'm including a '25 Books Every Christian Should Read' checklist to get you started in your journey. But don't stop there!

Subscribe to our [Thoughts from Canaan newsletter](#) today!

The Thoughts from Canaan newsletter is a convenient tool that you can use to grow in grace and knowledge. Every week you'll receive a newsletter that details all of the content that was made available in the previous week - content that will encourage, educate, entertain, and help you evaluate your spiritual growth.

You'll have the opportunity to listen to 30-45 minute podcasts - you'll hear discussions on everything from humor to Sabbath to how we can listen to sermons more effectively. These conversations with pastors as well as lay-leaders should encourage you to learn and practice more of what God has in store.

In addition to the podcast, articles will be released every week. We're hoping to include a variety of articles, including some which will be focused on explaining the scriptures by examining books of the Bible, one verse at a time. Others that will be released will be about theology, Christian history, or some aspect of biblical studies. In addition, we're hoping to release some that cover more practical component of living the Christian life.

If you will allow them, the newsletter, podcast, and articles will give you the tools that you need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. When you have questions, send them in or leave a comment on the article or podcast. My hope is that we can grow in grace and knowledge together - as one body, one people, one Kingdom. As the writer to the Hebrews said, "And let us consider how to

provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."¹⁸

I look forward to growing with you.

In Christian Love,
C.C.I. Fenn

¹⁸ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Heb 10:24-25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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25 Books Every Christian Should Read (In No Particular Order)

Books for Growing in Grace

1. [*Andrew Murray on Prayer*](#) by Andrew Murray
2. [*Celebration of Discipline*](#) by Richard Foster
3. [*The Imitation of Christ*](#) by Thomas a Kempis
4. [*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*](#) by John Wesley
5. [*The Practice of the Presence of God*](#) by Brother Lawrence
6. [*A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God*](#) by Reuben Job
7. [*After You Believe*](#) by N.T. Wright
8. [*Hearing God*](#) by Dallas Willard
9. [*Eat This Book*](#) by Eugene Peterson
10. [*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*](#) by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
11. [*Whatever Happened to Worship*](#) by A.W. Tozer
12. [*The Pilgrim's Progress*](#) by John Bunyan
13. [*Morning and Evening*](#) by C.H. Spurgeon
14. [*A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*](#) by William Law

Books for Growing in Knowledge

15. [*Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*](#) by E. Randolph Richards & Brandon O'Brien
16. [*The Case for Faith*](#) by Lee Stroebel
17. [*Mere Christianity*](#) by C.S. Lewis
18. [*Theology: The Basics*](#) by Alister McGrath
19. [*Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*](#) by Roger Olson
20. [*Five Points*](#) by John Piper
21. [*What Have They Done with Jesus?*](#) by Ben Witherington
22. [*The Spreading Flame*](#) by F.F. Bruce
23. [*The Confessions*](#) by St. Augustine
24. [*Scripture and the Authority of God*](#) by N.T. Wright
25. [*Knowing God*](#) by J.I. Packer