

# ***The Discipleship Journey; Part 3***

## ***The Process, Priority, and Pressing***

***Hazen Stevens - Sunday, August 20, 2023***

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- I. In this teaching, I want to communicate the following: First, review the process of discipleship and spiritual formation as Billy & Hannah laid out in the previous sessions. Secondly, describe love as the priority of a disciple's life. Thirdly, describe how pressing at the end of the age will purify and reveal love.
  
- II. Introduction: The Process, Priority, and Pressing
  - A. 1 Thessalonians 3:11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.
    1. "God and Father Himself, direct our way to you" - Process of Discipleship
    2. "May you increase and abound to one another and to all, just as we do to you..." - Priority of Love
    3. "He may establish your hearts...at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..." - Pressing of the End of the Age
  
  - A. We see these same imperatives in the Great Commandment & Great Commission
    1. The Great Commission - Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go [c]therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." [d]Amen.
  
    2. The Great Commandment - Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is *the* first and great commandment. 39 And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
      - a) *The Process* - Mathew 28:19 "Go [c]therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."
  
      - b) *The Priority* - Matthew 22:37-38 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...You shall love your neighbor...on these two commandments hang the law and prophets."

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- c) *The Pressing* - Matthew 28:20 “I, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- (1) What we do today in discipleship we will continue to do until the end of days!
  - (2) The word translated "always" in this verse comes from a special Greek phrase only used here in the New Testament: *pasas tas hēmeras*. It literally means "the whole of every day." This is then extended to all eternity with the expression *heōs tēs synteleias tou aiōnos*: "even to the end of the age." Jesus' promise is to be with His followers—in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:24) every minute of every day, until the very end of the present age, and then into eternal life beyond<sup>1</sup>
1. There will be a culmination of this age when the work of discipleship from generation to generation beginning with Christ's first disciples culminates with a mature, holy, love-filled bride at the end of the age. The work of the preparation of that bride is not reserved only for the final generation alone, it is the legacy of all disciples throughout the ages who have faithfully carried the torch from generation to generation, so that there will be a ready people when the Lord does appear. We will have all contributed to her maturity, even if it does not come in our own generation. We must play our part in our generation, for her to emerge.
    - a) 2 Peter 3:11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

### II. The Process: Altar, Table, Road frames our Rule of Life

- A. We spent the last couple of months defining an important framework of spiritual formation called Altar, Table, Road.
  1. Altar – Place of worship, prayer, study of scripture, and practices of devotion to the Lord. For us, this takes place in the 24/7 prayer room, and not just the prayer closet.
  2. Table – Place of fellowship, teaching, and life-on-life discipleship in the community.
  3. Road – Place of evangelism, outreach, and mission. This could be our outreach to a neighbor, co-worker, or family member, or it could be our commitment to international missions or care for those in need. It is local and global.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bibleref.com/Matthew/28/Matthew-28-20.html#:~:text=It literally means "the whole,the present age, and the](https://www.bibleref.com/Matthew/28/Matthew-28-20.html#:~:text=It literally means )

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- B. So if these are our imperatives (Commandment & Commission) and our framework (Altar, Table, Road) how do we apply them? Hannah answered that question last week, we partner with a process of spiritual formation whose end result is our conformity to Christ. This process involves rhythms, practices, seasons, and spaces. God is in charge of and leading this process, we participate in it through continual surrender to the master craftsman's hand. God is making a beautiful reflection of himself in you.
1. We must understand God is in charge of this process. People are not mainly disciplining you, God is. People are participating in your discipleship, but God is the artist. He requires your surrender to His process, and when you surrender what you receive is love. We must yield to the potter's hand.<sup>2</sup> God uses everything (Romans 8:28) "We know in all things God works for the good..." He lovingly uses the bumps the bruises the mess ups and the mistakes.
  2. *Practices* are the spiritual disciplines of what I do, the *rhythms* are when I do them, the *seasons* are the transitional times when the rhythms and disciplines change, and the *spaces* are simply where I do them. Understanding the value of discerning these dimensions with God helps us follow the path on the journey through the twists and turns of life.
    - a) Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. 9 Do not be like the horse *or* like the mule, *Which* have no understanding, *Which* must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you. (Illustration: Nay Nay & Boo Boo)
    - b) Video: Don't be like doodles...<sup>3</sup>
- A. A rule of life is a way to describe practices, rhythms, seasons, and spaces in a way that takes the vision of discipleship/formation and translates it into regular behaviors that can become habits. As "vision becomes behavior" lives are transformed into love-filled reflections of Christ. We are called to be conformed to Christ, but what does that mean behaviorally? *If you don't begin with the end in mind, then you won't take the right path.*
- B. Bringing it all together: A balanced rule of life combines elements of Altar, Table, and Road framework with the right measures of Practices, Rhythms, Seasons, and Spaces. This may not be how everyone does it, but I want to give an example of how I am doing it in this season.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4AcOM43gHA>

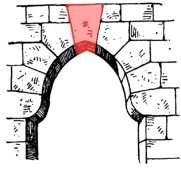
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJMtcDdFgVI>

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- a) My Example: Altar - I am committed to daily beginning and ending my day with God, 5-10 corporate prayer meetings weekly at the Prayer Room, and fasting weekly & monthly. I will engage with the study of end times in scripture in this coming season. Table - I am home daily for dinner with my family and want to be rested enough to be fully present, I am setting aside ministry/work commitments to be with them on my weekly Sabbath, and I am going to connect monthly with my brothers for encouragement and accountability, and weekly with a mentor. Road - I am going to work to increase my mission giving in this season, and I am committed to sharing my story using my testimony card wherever I go.
- b) Also, here is a tip it is **\*\*very important\*\*** to write it down, when you write down your goals and commitments it immediately becomes 42% more likely you will do it just by the simple act of writing it down. "The research is conclusive. Dr. Gail Matthews, a psychology professor at Dominican University in California, did a study<sup>4</sup> on goal setting with 267 participants. She found that you are 42 percent more likely to achieve your goals just by writing them down."<sup>5</sup>
- c) A simple way to accelerate growth in your lifestyle is to enroll in a training program that equips you and holds you accountable for those components for a season. (Ex: Global School, GC-School of Discipleship, GC-Intensive)
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1. Every season will have components of Altar, Table, Road but practices, rhythms, and spaces will vary accordingly. This makes the practice of intentional retreat & reflection a keystone practice in spiritual formation because it is in times of seasonal reflection we adjust practices, rhythms, and seasons.
  2. There are natural times in my year when I take time aside to prayerfully consider my manner/rule of life (ex: start of school year, start of new year, and start of summer). Taking time to pause and surrender my season to God, taking everything, and putting everything back up for discussion with God is a way I align myself with his purposes, and during those times I will intentionally pray Colossians 1:9-11.
    - a) Colossians 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may *be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully *pleasing Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

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<sup>4</sup> <https://kitzu.org/study-highlights-strategies-for-achieving-goals/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://fullfocus.co/5-reasons-why-you-should-commit-your-goals-to-writing/#:~:text=The research is conclusive.,just by writing them down.>

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3. Now having given some practical instruction on how we can partner with God in our discipleship and formation, I want to shift from the “what” we do in discipleship, to the priority measurement of our conformity to Christ. If we don’t make the cultivation of love in our hearts toward God and others the goal, then truly the end result of all our spiritual practices is “worth nothing” because we have the wrong focus.
- I. The Priority: Abundant in Love
    - A. “To love abundantly is to live abundantly, and to love for ever is to live for ever. Hence, eternal life is inextricably bound up with love We want to live for ever for the same reason that we want to live tomorrow. Why do you want to live tomorrow? It is because there is some one who loves you, and whom you want to see tomorrow, and be with, and love back. There is no other reason why we should live on than that we love and are beloved.” – Henry Drummond, The Greatest Thing in the World
    - B. What does the Bible say is most important as we seek to become like Jesus? Love. But we need to clarify what we mean by that because culture and dead religion have distorted the meaning. Culture has reduced it to a fizzy feeling, and religion to simply dispassionate learning and moral behavior.
      1. Unfortunately, we say we love ice cream, our favorite music or food, and our children all with the same word. But what we mean is that we really like many of things, but there are probably very few things that we actually love according to a biblical definition. True biblical love relationships are very precious, they are what we live and sacrifice for.
      2. If through my discipleship experience love for God and others is not being cultivated in my heart, then I am not on the right path. If my growth in knowledge is not producing love, then I am not on the right path. If I behave legalistically and morally but am a miserable person, then I am not pursuing the most excellent way of love.
      3. Paul tells us without love all our gifting, knowledge, and sacrifice result in nothing more than a dissonant noisy sound, ‘being nothing’ and ‘gaining nothing.’
        - a) 1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues<sup>[a]</sup> of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,<sup>[b]</sup> but do not have love, I gain nothing.

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- C. If love for God and others is the priority of “well disciplined life.” When we understand this we prevent ourselves from many distractions and ‘false focuses’ on the journey. Though culture may treat love as very subjective, scripture is very concrete in its’ descriptions of love, and it is those qualities primarily that demonstrate our progress as a disciple.
1. John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
- D. 3 Passages that define and prioritize love:
1. John 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.
  2. 1 John 4:10-12;21 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. ...<sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.<sup>[d]</sup> (NLT)
  3. 1 Corinthians 13:4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not <sup>[b]</sup>puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, <sup>[c]</sup>thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- E. Biblical Love = Sacrificial Cruciform Longsuffering Devotion
- F. I am taking communion daily in this season, and I was struck this week that God could have gone through the act of forgiving my sins as a legal transaction because he is merciful and pitied me. That still would have been very kind of Him and better than I deserved. But He chooses to risk putting His heart into it. Jesus and the Father gave me this to forgive and nourish me because He loves me and wants to have a relationship with me, communion thus represents a covenant of forgiveness fashioned in love. It is a picture of the kind of love I am to imitate as His disciple.
- G. In the final pressing of Jesus at the Cross, love was what was revealed. In the final pressing of the bride at the end of the age, love is what will be revealed in the heart of the mature Church.

## II. The Pressing: How Adversity at the End of the Age Reveals Love

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- A. The most adverse time in human history will reveal through the pressing the mature love of the bride.
  - 1. Matthew 24: 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.
  - 2. Matthew 24:10 and then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another..10 because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.  
13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.
  
- B. The Bride will be mature in love and holiness because of the leadership of Jesus, and we will not love our own lives more than we love Him.
  - 1. Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing[b] her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.
  - 2. Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.
  - 3. Revelation 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.
  
- C. Song of Songs poetically describes the mature love of the bride in the story
  - 1. Song of Solomon 8:6-7: Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy[c] as enduring as the grave.[d] Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it. If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned. (NLT)
  
- A. Discipleship continues until at the end of the age we come to ‘the measure of the stature of the *fullness* of Christ.’ We will be like our beloved.
  - 1. Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the [e]difying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ