

PASTOR'S NOTES. Thoughts on Being a Disciple, Part 4.

Three months ago I mentioned the Biblical background of this model of a disciple:

AN ACTIVE DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ:

1. Is involved in regular Christian service to others;
2. Is a student in a regular Bible School, Sunday School, or other learning environment with a teacher or mentor;
3. Is a regular in corporate worship and private prayer;
4. Is looking for and working with pre-Christians and new Christians to be a mentor for them.

Now I want to focus on the third of these: WORSHIP and PRAYER.

If you ask the typical person, Christian or not, what is the primary *private* action of a Christian, most would probably say PRAYER. If you would ask them what is the primary *public* action of a Christian, most would probably say WORSHIP. These two are closely connected. If you add to this that almost every worship song or hymn is either words of witness (talking about God) or a prayer (talking to God), you could say that worship is public prayer, and prayer is private worship.

While we have many prepared prayers, both in the Bible and in other books, the ideal prayer is far more informal: being ourselves in God's presence, saying what is on our mind, listening, and observing God's work in the world. This is likely the prayer that Paul mentions in almost all of his letters:

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you." Philippians 1:3-4

"For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of His Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers." Romans 1:9

"I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers." Ephesians 1:16

"For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's[£] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Colossians 1:9

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving." Colossians 4:2

"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints." Ephesians 6:18

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

But there is another connection between prayer and public worship. You have probably heard many persons say that you can be a Christian without attending any church. Some might argue that you could follow the four-part description of a disciple above and simply remove *corporate*

worship. Line 3 is then simply about private prayer. Unfortunately, this is usually the result of a bad experience in their Christian family. To be an active disciple without public worship might be theoretically possible, but the reality most often is that when people stop attending a church, the rest of their spiritual life suffers. It is unlikely that you know of anyone who does not attend a church that is growing in their life of service and prayer. Consider that this person probably has broken relationships, and we have a human need to form new relationships or to heal old ones.

I want to suggest that from God's perspective, the primary purpose of worship is to hold all other aspects of our life together. We have a need to celebrate the wonder of life, but God doesn't need our praise. There are a number of places in scripture where God actually criticizes worship because it is only talking and not doing, or inconsistent with the rest of our life: Isaiah 29:13, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8, Amos 5:21-24, Isaiah 58:5-7. (I talk more about these in the last part of the video series "Why Worship Services are Overrated" that you can find in the videos on the church website maplestchurch.com) From God's perspective, service to others is more important than homage to Him.

But the four aspects of being a disciple are not items to pick and choose. My observation is that a healthy Christian needs them all; and in most cases where someone says to me that their faith (or life in general) seems dry, I can see that they are lacking in at least one of the four areas. So:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

Worship is how we remember who we are and Whose we are.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:41-47 (NRSV)

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'R' followed by a long horizontal stroke.