

TRUE LEARNING

TO FOLLOW JESUS 4



True learning is learning to live Jesus.

T. M. MOORE

A ReVision Study from

The Fellowship of Ailbe

True Learning
To Follow Jesus Part 4
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True Learning

Contents

Welcome to <i>True Learning</i>	4
1 Ever Learning	5
2 Disciplines of True Learning	7
3 Friends of God	9
4 Waiting on the Lord	11
5 Sinners All	13
6 The Covenant and Testimonies of God	15
7 Instructed by God	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

Welcome to *True Learning*

True followers of Jesus are disciples – learners. And what they are principally *learning* is Jesus. True learning is learning to live Jesus in all the everyday situations and opportunities of our lives.

We haven't really learned something until it shapes our thoughts, affections, and priorities so powerfully that our words and deeds begin to change. God has marked out a path of discipleship for the followers of Jesus, and all who are truly learning Him will walk that path increasingly and consistently. True learning involves specific disciplines that bring us into the blessings of God, and make us a blessing to the people around us. For every follower of Jesus Christ, true learning will take certain forms, while the manifestation of that learning will be unique to our individual lives and callings – our Personal Mission Fields.

As we wait upon the Lord and walk in His Spirit, we will find Jesus increasing in us, and our old lives decreasing accordingly. Then we will indeed be friends of God and disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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May the Lord bless you as you take up this study, *To Follow Jesus*, that you might grow in Him and His calling each and every day of your life.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Ever Learning

For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3.6, 7

*Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.* Psalm 25.4, 5

Learning, but not

We need to say an additional word or two about the calling of those who follow Jesus to be *learners*. We cannot follow Jesus if we aren't willing to devote ourselves to the lifelong pursuit of Him as learners. But we're not likely to benefit from our learning efforts if we're not clear about what learning actually involves.

American Christians today are the most Christian-educated generation in the history of the Church. We have more opportunities for studying the Bible and related Christian materials than all the generations of Christians that have preceded us rolled together: more courses, seminars, schools, study materials, media, and assorted other modes of instruction than the Church has ever known.

So why is the American Church languishing on the margins of society, with very little input to shape the key issues and challenges of our day? Why is there so little evidence of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, dispersed and growing throughout our society? Why are Christians so reluctant to talk about their faith? Why are our churches not growing?

The answer to all these questions is that, while we are ever about the task of learning something about the Bible and the Christian faith, we don't seem to be able to get to the real knowledge of the truth – the truth that is *in* Christ Jesus.

The truth that is in Christ Jesus sets us free from burdens and sinful passions, because the truth is in God's Word, a living power that penetrates to the depths of our souls and, in the hands of God's Spirit, transforms us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (Jn. 8:32; Heb. 4:12; 2 Cor. 3:12-18). We are truly learning when we are learning Jesus as the Word of God, in the hands of God's Spirit, transforms us inside-out and outside-in into the very image of the Lord.

This, as is quite evident, is happening precious little among American Christians.

The right focus

True learning begins with having the right focus, the right horizon toward which we are travelling. In the Church today so much of our Christian education is focused on us and what we want or hope God will do for us. It's also focused primarily on imparting *content*, as though communicating doctrine, principles, and formulas for helping ourselves to the good things of the Lord were a proper end in itself.

But according to the Apostle Paul, and to David, writing in Psalm 25, true learning must have a different focus, a different overall objective, if we are ever to get beyond mere learning and arrive at the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

True Learning

Intimate, personal, transforming

David insists that true learning must be focused in God – knowing Him, resting in Him and His promises, walking in His ways, and discovering in Him the proper orientation and direction for our lives. He explains that if we hope to learn anything at all, we must take as our focus to understand *and* walk in the ways and paths of the Lord, to become *fully immersed* in His salvation, on His terms, (vv. 4, 8-10).

Learning, in other words, is more than merely understanding content, or satisfying our personal interests or needs. Our learning will have arrived at the knowledge of the truth when we have come to *know* the ways and paths of the Lord (v. 4), and to *follow* in them faithfully (vv. 5, 9). Then we will *dwell* consciously within the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord, owning His promises and keeping His Law (v. 10).

Such true learning is intimate, deeply personal, and powerfully transforming in every area of our lives. Through such learning we put off our old selves and are clothed in the beautiful garments of righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. We decrease, but He increases, and the hope of glory in which we stand becomes more visible and palpable in us day by day (Jn. 3.30; Rom. 5.1, 2; 1 Pet. 3.15).

We will know that we have begun to arrive at the knowledge of the truth when the truth that is in Jesus sets us free from our sinful ways, liberating us to live in the full light and glory of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit. In such a setting we will be able to determine the Lord's true calling for our lives, so that we live for Him, worship Him, serve Him, and manifest His glory in all we are, think, say, and do.

If the Church in America were experiencing this kind of learning, the Church – and perhaps America as well – would be an altogether different place.

For reflection

1. What are some of the important keys for getting beyond *mere* learning to *learning the truth* that is in Jesus?
2. Do you agree that little of this kind of learning is in evidence in our day? Why or why not?
3. In what ways would you like to see yourself decreasing and Jesus increasing more?

Next steps – Preparation: Share this article with a Christian friend. Ask your friend to read all seven installments of this series. Make an appointment to get together at the end of this series and discuss how you might help one another press on toward true learning.

2 Disciplines of True Learning

Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. Psalm 25.12

A way for each of us

Every follower of Jesus Christ has a *calling* from the Lord, a way of life the Lord has chosen, a way to live in the world as a citizen of the Kingdom of God and a follower and ambassador of Jesus Christ. When we have begun to learn the truth that is in Jesus and His Word, we will find ourselves in that way, putting on Jesus and living as His witnesses in every situation. Then we will know and experience more of the grace, presence, and power of the Lord for making all things new in and through our lives.

There is a good deal of mystery here, for no two believers follow the same path, take up the same calling, or express their love for Jesus in the same situations or to the same people. Each of us has a [Personal Mission Field](#) to which the Lord sends us day by day for the purpose of making Him known and bringing near His Kingdom.

When God Himself has instructed us in His truth, we will accept His calling, identify our own path, and take up the disciplines that will help us to live it fully and abundantly. We can know that we are truly beginning to learn when our individual way becomes clear and we find ourselves walking in it faithfully, day by day.

Yet though our ways be many and varied, certain similarities in how we approach our path will characterize every follower of Jesus Christ.

Preparation

Walking in the way God has chosen for us involves four disciplines. These include the *preparation* we make each day, the *conversations* we hold with others, the ways we *demonstrate* the transforming power of truth in our own lives, and the kinds of *transformations* we experience and seek within our path. Of these, preparation is by far the most important.

By His Word and Spirit, God helps each of us find this way; but we must be about the task of seeking it by coming to Jesus daily and learning from Him (Matt. 11.28-30). In order to learn this way, and to walk in it, we need to put ourselves in a mode of continuous preparation. This involves being with the Lord – in His Word, prayer, meditation, fasting, solitude, study, and worship – so that we encounter His glory and are transformed by it.

It also means careful and prayerful planning, so that we commit our time and work to the Lord before we arrive at it (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). As part of our time with the Lord, we should talk with Him about the day ahead, preparing our schedule and our minds and hearts for walking with the Lord in every situation, so that we make the most of all our time for fulfilling our calling as followers of Christ (Eph. 5.15-17).

If we have poor or inconsistent habits of preparation, we will never realize the full scope and joy of our callings in the Lord.

Conversation, demonstration, transformation

As we improve our *preparations* for the way God has chosen for us, we will learn how to make the best use of our words in *conversations* with others so that they experience us as truthful, gracious, edifying, informed, and focused on the Savior.

The Bible has a great deal to say about how we use our tongues, and, since we cannot avoid the daily conversations in which we become involved, we must prepare for them before Jesus, so that our voice is one

True Learning

with His whenever we talk with anyone about anything.

Further, in the way God has chosen for us we will *demonstrate* the servant heart of the Lord Jesus in our relationships with others (Jn. 13.1-15). This will mean learning to be sensitive to the needs of others, taking the initiative to show love, give help, extend a caring gesture, or sacrifice some precious possession for the sake of others. When the words we speak and the ways we relate to others are increasingly like the words and ways of Jesus, we will know that true learning is taking place within us. Then, with solid preparations in place, and growing in our ability to speak and serve like Jesus, we will discover ways of making an impact for the Kingdom of God on the people, situations, and culture in which we are continuously involved.

That is, we will think in terms more of how the Gospel can *transform* us – soul and life – and through us, bring transforming grace to bear on the people and in the social and cultural arenas of our lives. If we *prepare* well for transformation, and if our *conversations* and the ways we *demonstrate* the grace of God are focused on *transformation*, then we may expect to see righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit increasing in our experience and all along our way – the Kingdom of God, coming on earth as it is in heaven.

God has prepared a way for you, and He can teach you what it is. You'll know you are truly learning when *His* way becomes, increasingly, *your* way as well.

For reflection

1. The way God has chosen for you provides the setting within which you will follow Him. Have you identified your [Personal Mission Field](#)?
2. How would you assess the state of your daily preparations for walking in the way God has chosen for you?
3. How might you make better use of the opportunities God gives you for talking about and showing Jesus to others?

Next steps – Preparation: If you have not mapped out your Personal Mission Field, watch this brief video ([click here](#)), download the worksheet, and get going!

3 Friends of God

*He himself shall dwell in prosperity,
And his descendants shall inherit the earth.
The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him,
And He will show them His covenant.* Psalm 25.13, 14

The principle objective of true learning

Jesus said that His followers were His friends (Jn. 15.14, 15). In the most general of terms, they who have truly begun to learn truth and to walk in the way God has prepared for them will think of themselves as friends of God. Friendship with the Lord involves continuous intimacy with Him, such that we know His presence, commune with Him constantly, and are sensitive to His prompts, impulses, and directives as they apply to the people and situations of our lives. The “secret” of the Lord, which is His Kingdom, is the possession of all His friends, and they seek and advance it as they walk in the way He has chosen for them.

The more we grow as followers of the Lord, the stronger our friendship with Him will become. And the stronger our friendship, the more the secrets of the Kingdom – its presence, promise, and power – will fill us and spill through us into our Personal Mission Fields.

Friendship with the Lord must be the principle objective to which we aspire as true learners. That friendship will pervade our preparations, characterize our conversations, adorn our demonstrations of God’s love, and make it so that we are able to wield the transforming power of the Lord in every area of our lives.

The friendship of the Lord comes to expression in our lives in three primary ways.

It is well with our souls

First, an overall *sense of wellbeing* pervades the souls of Jesus’ friends. We spend much time with Him, and we know His presence with us throughout the day. We keep short accounts with the Lord, confessing our sins and turning from them at once; resisting temptation; rejoicing in the midst of trials; and experiencing a deep-seated sense of peace and joy.

We look out on the world with the mind of Christ, relate to others with His heart of grace, and make seeking His Kingdom the defining priority of our lives. Thus our souls rest in the assurance of His presence, delight in the knowledge of His will, and grow strong through His Spirit in peace and joy.

The comfort we feel in our souls, the assurance of salvation that constantly protects us, the undercurrent of joy and peace that pervades our lives – these are the fruit of walking with our Friend and knowing His presence with us at all times.

Blessed and blessing

This is what it means to be *blessed* of the Lord, which is the first promise of our covenant relationship with Him (cf. Gen. 12.1-3). In such a relationship the Lord is able to make known to us His precious and very great promises (2 Pet. 1.4), so that we do not set our hope on the fleeting things and circumstances that others seek for their happiness. Our hope is in the Lord, and our desire is to know more of His promises, to be blessed by God so that we become a blessing in every way to others.

As we grow in friendship with the Lord, He shows us more of His covenant – His precious and very great promises, which are in Jesus. This is the second great privilege of those who enjoy His friendship, the ability to increase in blessedness and to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

True Learning

From within the friendship of God and His covenant, the friends of the Lord extend His friendship to others so that they – whether spouse, children, friends, associates at work, fellow church members, or total strangers – “inherit the earth,” the precious promises and blessings of the Lord, by virtue of their involvement with us.

But God is jealous for our friendship, and we must be jealous for His as well. We must remember what James said: We cannot be friends of the world and friends with God (Jms. 4.4). If, as we walk the path God has prepared for us, we want our heavenly Friend to be our constant companion, we must turn away from the temptations of the world and find all our satisfaction in Jesus Christ. In His presence is fullness of joy; at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11).

We’ll know that we are truly learning when, in our preparations, conversations, deeds of love, and efforts to bring transforming grace to bear on the people and culture around us, we enjoy the constant sense of the Lord’s presence. Then our souls will be at rest, His promises will be our every desire, and His blessings will flow through us to others.

For reflection

1. What do you understand by the idea of being Jesus’ friend? How would you expect others to see that you and Jesus are friends?
2. Mediate on Genesis 12.1-3. Why does Peter refer to these promises as “precious”?
3. All the promises of God are realized in Jesus (2 Cor. 1.20). Why does this make growing in friendship with Him all that much more important?

Next steps – Conversation: Today, make a point of sharing with someone what it means for you to be a friend of Jesus.

4 Waiting on the Lord

*Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.* Psalm 25.5

Teaching as He went

Very little of the teaching Jesus did was in the kind of context in which we normally pursue the work of Christian education. He had no classroom, no chalk board or PowerPoints, and no certificate to offer those who completed His course. Jesus taught His disciples as they walked in the way, in the midst of a busy crowd, pointing to everyday situations and things, and challenging them concerning their own thoughts, fears, and desires.

Jesus' teaching was an ongoing activity; He didn't just isolate His instruction to scheduled meetings and formal settings. Certainly there was some of that; however, mostly Jesus worked to help His disciples be always alert, always open to His input, and thinking continuously about the applications of His instruction to their daily activities.

Which means, of course, that not only was *Jesus' teaching* of this informal, as-you-are-going nature, so was *His disciples' learning*. True learning occurs in the midst of everyday life, along the way God has chosen for us, as we are walking in and working our Personal Mission Fields, waiting on the Lord to help us make the most of all the time of our lives.

We will make more progress in true learning if we take up this practice, which David described as “waiting” on the Lord, in every situation.

A constant vigil

When we're waiting for someone we're practicing a kind of vigil. At any moment we expect those we're waiting for to show up. We make preparations accordingly, block out distractions, put our diversions on hold, and keep glancing at the clock or out the window to see if our expected guests are about to arrive.

Waiting, in other words, is a very *active* posture. When we're waiting, we're *anticipating* what will transpire when our guests arrive, *planning* what we might say, *thinking about* the best ways to please them, and *readying our hearts* to welcome and serve them.

Something like this should characterize how we enter into our everyday lives if we are going to learn the truth of God along the way He has prepared for us, and travel in that way as His friends. We need times of formal instruction from the Lord, beginning in time with Him each day.

But we also need to learn the discipline of waiting on Him throughout the day. By waiting on the Lord, we will be able to learn how to apply His Word to the various situations and opportunities of our lives. Because *true learning* comes to fruition in the everyday contexts of life. If it does not, then our learning is *merely* intellectual, and we may be learning and learning more and more all the time, but we will not come to the knowledge of *truth* until we live it out in the way and along the path God has chosen for us.

Pray without ceasing

How can we improve this critical component of learning? Waiting on the Lord begins in an attitude of continuous prayer. When Jesus commanded His disciples to go back to Jerusalem and *wait* for the promise of the Father, they immediately set up a continuous prayer meeting that lasted for ten days (Acts 1). We wait on the Lord as we set our minds on Him, tune our hearts to beat with His, and maintain open communications

True Learning

with Him in every situation.

As we wait on the Lord we will engage in what Paul described as prayer without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17). While we can't be always talking to the Lord about this, that, or the other, we *can* always be in communion with Him, ready whenever He speaks to us, and responsive to however He leads.

This ability can be greatly helped by setting aside several times during the day for brief retreats of prayer, in which we draw aside from our daily activities, focus on Jesus Christ exalted at the Father's right hand, and offer words of praise, thanks, and intercession. We can make these standing appointments at set times of the day, or we can develop the ability of beginning and ending each task or meeting with prayer, if only within our souls.

The more we do this, the more we will carry that attitude of prayer into every waking moment. As that begins to happen, we will find that our hearts and minds seem to be more open to the Lord. We can *hear* His Spirit guiding us this way and that. We will *see* opportunities for serving others, which we will want to make the most of as the Lord's friends. Every moment, every activity, and every relationship of our lives will begin to seem more like a staging-ground for God's redeeming grace and truth to flow through us to others as we learn to wait on the Lord throughout the day.

True learning will not occur, as David pointed out, until waiting on the Lord becomes the envelope within which we live along the way our God has chosen for us.

For reflection

1. Would you describe your daily life as "waiting" on the Lord at this time? Why or why not?
2. What do we mean by saying that true learning comes to fruition in daily life? Can you give an example of this in your own experience?
3. Suggest some ways you might begin to improve your practice of waiting on the Lord.

Next steps – Transformation: What will you need to do in order to begin waiting on the Lord more consciously and consistently throughout the day?

5 Sinners All

*Good and upright is the LORD;
Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.
The humble He guides in justice,
And the humble He teaches His way.* Psalm 25:8, 9

Nothing to give, everything to gain

Learning should be a humbling experience. We won't learn Jesus, or how to live for Him in His way, until we set aside every vaunted view of ourselves, admit our ignorance and need, and apply ourselves as diligent students to growing in Him.

That is, we will not experience true learning until we humble ourselves before the Lord. Of course, we can learn Bible verses, doctrines, even the content of whole books of the Scriptures – and have a good time doing so – without humbling ourselves before the Lord. But we will not really learn the truth or begin to live it in the way He has chosen for us, until we engage the learning process in an attitude of humility.

The humble person is the one who knows he knows nothing, deserves nothing, and has nothing to offer, but seeks everything to help him in his way. When we come to the Lord with humble hearts, we set aside all our preconceived notions and interests and hold out our hands meekly for whatever He may wish to give us. But most of all, the humble person is the one who admits that he falls short of God's expectations, and always has room to grow in making His glory known (Rom. 3:23; Hab. 2:14).

Our need

The humble person, in other words, recognizes that he is a sinner, daily in need of the mercy and grace of the Lord to cleanse him from all unrighteousness and renew him in the Spirit and way of the Lord.

We don't hear much talk about sin in the churches these days, and this is a contributing factor to why our efforts in the work of Christian education are bearing so little fruit. Only when God's people are willing to admit their sin will they turn to the Lord for the cleansing and renewing help only He can provide. And only then, when they have faced up to and set aside their old selves, will they be in a position to put on Jesus and learn Him as they should (Eph. 4:17-24).

But what is sin, and how does it find its way into our lives?

Sin

We may think of sin in two ways. First, sin, as *The Westminster Catechism* has it, "is any want of conformity to or transgression of the Law of God." This nicely summarizes the Apostle James' teaching in James 2, which itself is an echo of the Lord Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:15-17).

We sin against God when we violate His Law, whether in our hearts and minds or by works of commission or omission. Given the sad neglect of the Law of God in most churches today, it's not hard to imagine that sensitivity to sin is growing rather faint among the followers of Christ. The Law was given, at least in part, to enable us to know sin (Rom. 3:20). Until we humble ourselves before the Law of God, we'll have a hard time dealing with our sin.

Sin is also whatever we do that is not done in faith and obedience to the Lord (Rom. 14:23). If there are any activities in your life, any thoughts, conversations, or other ways of spending your time and strength, that you are *not* undertaking as an act of obedience to God, as a follower of Jesus Christ, then there is a very good

True Learning

possibility that this might be sin. Sin enters our lives when we aren't paying attention; sometimes, though, we willingly give ourselves to sin, for the law of sin continues to be a powerful force within us.

But if we truly want to learn what God has to teach us, we shall have to humble ourselves before Him, confessing and repenting of all our sins, whatever they may be.

What I'm saying is nothing more nor less than what the Apostle John said: The followers of Jesus *know* the commandments of God, *delight* in the Law of God, and *walk the path* of His commandments, because this is the path that Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2.1-6). If we think we do not need the Law of God, that hubris will keep us from growing in love for God and our neighbors (cf. Matt. 22.34-40), and will render us *incapable* of following Jesus in the as-you-are-goings of our daily lives.

If we would be true learners, we must be *humble* before our God, meditating day and night on His Law and commandments (Ps. 1), so that He might *show* us our sin and *guide us* with the lamp of His Word into every next step of our lives (Ps. 119.105).

The Law of God is the touchstone for all true learning. Ignore it, and you will never learn to love as God intends, and you will never truly learn Jesus.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Psalm 1. How would you describe your relationship to the Law of God at this time?
2. We are *not* under the Law so that we might *be saved*. But we *are* under the Law as we *work out our salvation*. Meditate on Ephesians 2.8-10. What works "before ordained" do you suppose Paul has in mind in verse 10 (cf. Rom. 3.31)? Can you give some examples of how the Law of God shows us the path of good works?
3. Jesus said that His followers would be "set free" – liberated – as they follow Him and learn the truth that is in Jesus (Jn. 8.32). How does James describe the Law of God in James 2.8-12? Explain.

Next steps – Transformation: How might you adjust your reading in Scripture to incorporate regular review and meditation on the Law of God?

6 The Covenant and Testimonies of the Lord

*All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth,
To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.* Psalm 25.10

Twin guardrails

In our text, the word *keep* is really, in the Hebrew, *guard*. We guard something when we are very careful to keep an eye on it and cherish it as though it were our own. David tells us that when we *guard* the covenant and testimonies of the Lord, the way He has chosen for us will be full of mercy (or steadfast love) and truth (or faithfulness). True learning, in other words, will be evident in us as we faithfully guard the covenant and testimonies of the Lord.

When we are thus instructed by the Lord, His Word and Spirit work transforming grace in us, so that we both know and give expression to the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord.

This is how God wants us to walk the path He has chosen for us. By preparing faithfully each day, using our conversations and acts of service as means of grace, working to reconcile others and our culture back to God, we follow the path Jesus did, because we have been sent as He was sent. All day long we continue in a learning mode, waiting on the Lord, listening for His Spirit to guide us in our chosen path, and being quick to confess our sins as He prompts us. This is the path of true learning.

This path in which true learning is expressed is protected by twin guardrails – the promises of God and His testimonies, or, Law. By keeping between these guardrails, we may learn the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord.

God's promises

The promises of God's covenant were first articulated to Abraham (Gen. 12.1-3). Essentially, these promises are two: God promises to *bless us* with His presence, favor, and provision; and He promises to use us as a means of *bringing His blessings to others* as well. We are blessed in order to be a blessing, to bring Christ and His Kingdom to the people in our path.

By seeking and laying hold of these promises, we actually partake of the divine being, of Christ Himself, because all the promises of God are fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1.4; 2 Cor. 1.20). The promises become powerful motivating forces in our lives as the indwelling Spirit of God enables us to realize those promises, be transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, and live as witnesses for Him. (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Acts 1.4-8). The promises of God are greater, and hold out the prospect of more transforming power, than you or I could ever imagine or dare to hope for (Eph. 3.20). By focusing on the promises of God, and living toward them in faith and obedience, we may expect to increase in steadfast love and faithfulness for every aspect of our calling from the Lord.

So, on the one hand, we follow the guardrail which has us looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We walk in the Spirit, Who is the power for our daily lives, waiting on the Lord and seeking to lay hold on the promises of God, that we might be blessed and be a blessing to others (Heb. 12.1, 2; Gal. 5.16). In your time with the Lord, therefore, focus on the various ways these promises are expressed throughout the Word of God. And as you walk His path throughout your day, keep those promises in mind, as you wait on Him Who extends them to you.

God's Law

The other guardrail is the Law of God, for, as we have seen, the Law teaches us everything we need to know about how to love God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40).

True Learning

The path that marks out the way God has chosen for us, along which we wait for Him and live out what He has taught us, is guarded by the covenant promises and gracious Law of the Lord. We *keep* or *guard* His covenant and testimonies (or Law) when we allow His Word to dwell in us richly (Col. 3.16), seek the things of Christ exalted at the Father's right hand (Col. 3.1-3), and listen in our souls for the instruction and conviction of the Spirit (Jn. 16.8-11). We seek out treasures of learning from the Old Testament and the New, so that we might show the wisdom of God in all our dealings with others (Matt. 13.52).

Thus, all the steps of our daily walk with the Lord lead us to seek Him for His blessings, so that we might extend those blessings to others. We will know true learning as we work out our salvation in terms of the righteousness, holiness, and goodness of the Law of God, and all His Word, and as we strive to gain the promises God holds out for us in Jesus Christ.

Any believer who does not aspire to such expressions of true learning is only deceiving himself about the efficacy of his Christian educational activities.

True learning follows the path which is guarded by God's covenant and Law, and true learners keep to this path, humbly before the Lord.

For reflection

1. Does your time in the Word of God reflect a healthy balance between the Old and New Testaments?
2. What does it mean to *guard* the promises and testimonies of the Lord? What are some ways you might be able to do this throughout the day?
3. The promises of God *motivate* our direction in life, while the testimonies of God *guide our every next step*. The way to the promises is through the Law. How can you see that in Israel's experience in the Old Testament? How can you see that in Jesus (Heb. 12.1)? How should that work out in your own experience?

Next steps – Conversation: How can believers help one another to stay between these two guardrails? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

7 Instructed by God

*Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.* Psalm 25.4, 5

A work of the Lord

True learning can only be accomplished by the Lord Himself. Unless He shows us the way, teaches us how to follow Jesus, and leads us along the path He has chosen for us, we may continue learning, but we'll never arrive at the knowledge of the truth. We must seek true learning at the Lord's hand, as we see David doing in Psalm 25.

And we must embrace the conditions under which true learning occurs: humility, desiring to be the friend of God, preparing to understand His ways and to discern the path He has chosen for us, waiting on Him continuously to guide and empower our conversations and works, and staying within the parameters marked out by His promises and Law.

Only God can accomplish true learning within us; nevertheless, we must seek Him earnestly and continuously for it, recognizing all the while that, unless the Lord teaches us, we shall not be taught. As Jesus explained, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing." (Jn. 6.63) Like David we must plead with the Lord to teach us, show us the way to follow Jesus, and guide us each step along that path.

Begin with the Word

So how does God teach us? What methods is He pleased to use in order to accomplish true learning in our lives?

Primarily, God speaks to us through His Word, which He has given through His prophets and apostles, by the inspiring guidance of His Spirit, so that we might know Him and be equipped to serve Him in the paths He has chosen for us (2 Tim. 3.15-17). The Scriptures are able to prepare us for every good work, so that we may demonstrate the transforming grace of Jesus in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

We must, therefore, develop good and consistent practices of reading, meditating on, and studying the Word of God if we hope truly to be taught by the Lord. Supplementing our personal time of reading and study of Scripture by submitting to the teaching of others and by reading from the great teachers of the Christian past can also help us to realize true learning more completely.

There is no substitute for feeding on the Word of God. You will never learn Jesus apart from dwelling in His Word. Plead with God to give you a heart for His Word, and to guide you day by day in learning Jesus as you read and meditate in Scripture.

The Word in creation

Second, however, we must not fail to observe that God is speaking to us not only through His Word but through the creation and culture all around us (Ps. 19.1-4; Ps. 68.18). God is revealing Himself and His will in all kinds of ways, all day long. And as we become more firmly grounded in His Word, we'll be able to *see* and *bear* Him, making Himself known in the works of His hands.

By taking up reading and study in various of the disciplines related to the creation – the arts, history, philosophy, and so forth – we may expect to learn more of God's ways and paths and to attain a fuller

True Learning

measure of true learning. This will be especially true if we concentrate in these disciplines on the observations and works of Christians who have given much attention to seeking God in creation and culture. Reading and reflecting on the biographies of great Christians from the past can be another source of guidance as we walk in the way God has chosen for us.

Learning from such sources helps to make us alert to the leading of God throughout the day, and discern practical and effective ways of talking about the Lord and showing His grace to others.

All such learning from God's *general revelation* must be vetted and filtered through the Scriptures; but in the light of Scripture we may expect to discern the voice of the Lord instructing us along the pathway of our lives through the various disciplines of study to which we might turn (Ps. 36.9). True learning requires an active approach to seeking the Lord for the instruction He provides.

But the promise of friendship with the Lord – true learning – that awaits us through such efforts should motivate us not to be content with the shallow instruction that so often characterizes our Christian educational activities, but to seek true learning every day of our lives.

For reflection

1. Suggest some things we might expect to learn about God by meditating on the creation.
2. Can you offer an example of how reading or studying in God's general revelation has helped you to express true learning in your Personal Mission Field?
3. Why is it so important that we keep Scripture as the touchstone and anchor for all our learning as followers of Jesus?

Next steps – Transformation: What can you add of reading or study in general revelation to enhance your experience of true learning? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

True Learning

For reflection or discussion

1. What's the difference between *true* learning and the learning most Christians seem to experience?
2. What are the keys to achieving more *true* learning as followers of Jesus?
3. Why do we say that the promises of God and the Law of God are the guardrails of the path God has chosen for us?
4. The paths Christians follow as disciples of Jesus are unique to each person. God has chosen a way that is just right for each of us. But in what ways are the paths of every Christian the same?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you working to bring that lesson to true learning along God's path for your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship to help us extend our ministry and resources to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.

