

TRUE LEARNING

DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES 4



Only God can bring us to true learning along the path He has chosen for us.

T. M. MOORE

A ReVision Study from

The Fellowship of Ailbe

True Learning

True Learning
Disciples Making Disciples Part 4
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True Learning

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Welcome to *True Learning*

Ours is perhaps the most Christian-educated generation of all time. We have more opportunities and resources for learning than any previous generation of believers.

But what are we learning? Doctrines? Bible themes? Moral guidelines?

Jesus?

True learning is God's work in us. As we seek Jesus in His Word and in the creation around us, the Spirit of God works within us to bring us into the glory of God. In His Presence, and by His grace, we are transformed, from glory to glory, into the likeness of Jesus. And when that happens, we are truly learning.

Here is Part 4 in our series, "Disciples Making Disciples."

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

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Always Learning...What?

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*. All disciples are learners, and all disciples are called to help other disciples learn Jesus. 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 involves.

How do we know when we're learning what we should?

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, apps, websites, newsletters, 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? Why is so little of the Presence of Jesus evident through our churches in our communities?

The answer to all these questions is that, while we are always engaged in the task of learning something about the Bible and the Christian faith, we don't seem to be realizing the 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 that truth is in God's Word, which is 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

We have said that learning Jesus is true learning, and the goal of our discipleship. True learning begins with having the right focus, the right horizon to aim at in our journey of discipleship. 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.

Knowing Bible content and orthodox doctrine, and how to apply these to our lives, can be a very important

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part of true learning. But not if we're content with these, that is, if we fail to allow them to take us all the way into Jesus.

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. In all our learning activities, the request of those ancient Greeks who came to Philip should be always on our mind: "We wish to see Jesus!" (Jn. 12.21) For only when we see Jesus, in all His radiant glory, will we be made more like Him through the burdensome task of 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). Jesus is the express image and likeness of God (Heb. 1.3). When we see Jesus, we've seen the Father (Jn. 14.9).

Learning is more than merely understanding content, increasing Bible knowledge, clarifying doctrinal understanding, 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 (Ps. 25.4; cf. 1 Jn. 2.1-6), because we see them clearly in Jesus, and to *follow* in them faithfully (Ps.25.5, 9) because we are becoming more like Jesus. 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 and the brightness of God's glory in 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: Take a look at all the various learning activities you're involved in at present. Are they all aimed at learning Jesus?

2 Discipleship Disciplines

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 disciple 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 journeying 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 disciples 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. That mission field comprises the “as-you-are-going” places and people of our lives, that part of the world to which Jesus has sent us for the purpose of being and making disciples (Matt. 28.18-20).

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 fulfill our calling with power and joy. We can know that we are truly beginning to learn when our individual path 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 and work our Personal Mission Field will characterize every follower of Jesus Christ.

Preparation

Walking in the way God has chosen for us involves four disciplines. These are 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 seek and realize within our Personal Mission Field. Of these four disciplines, preparation is by far the most important.

By His Word and Spirit, God helps each of us find the way specifically chosen for us; but we must be about the task of seeking it by coming to Jesus daily and learning from Him (Matt. 11.28-30). 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. Nothing good or lasting will result from our efforts as disciples making disciples apart from prayer.

Effective preparation also requires thoughtful 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). Think ahead to the places you will go and the people you will see during the day. What will be required of you as a disciple of Jesus? What opportunities for encouraging other disciples will you have? Get a picture in your mind of what you might do or say, and offer that to the Lord in prayer.

Other aspects of preparation include reading books, participating in a study group, having a prayer partner, prayerfully thinking through how to apply each week’s preaching to your work, and being diligent in getting to know people and their needs.

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 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). Following Jesus as a seeker, servant, shepherd, sower, and steward will provide many opportunities for growth in the Lord and serving others. 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 (Rom. 14.17, 18).

God has prepared a way for each of us as disciples of Jesus, and He can teach us what it is, help us to find it, and empower us to live for Christ in it. 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 disciples 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 disciples of the Lord, the stronger our friendship with Him will become. The more also our friendship with other disciples will grow, as we work for the mutual edification of one another. And the stronger our friendship with the Lord and one another, the more the secrets of the Kingdom – its presence, promise, and power – will fill us and flow through us into our Personal Mission Fields.

Friendship with the Lord must be the primary objective to which we aspire as true learners. That friendship will pervade our preparations for each day, characterize our conversations, adorn the demonstrations we make of God’s love, and fit us to wield the transforming power of the Lord in every area of our lives.

Our friendship with the Lord is realized in four 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. We are devoted to resisting temptation, rejoicing during trials, and nurturing 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 knowledge of His Presence, delight to embrace His will, and grow strong through obedience in His Spirit. We find that, in the Lord’s Presence, fullness of joy and holy pleasures are our constant companions (Ps. 16.11).

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 always knowing His Presence with us. Learning Jesus and growing as His friends, we can say with all honesty and joy, whatever our situation, “It is well with my soul.”

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 makes 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 we actually “partake” of Him in real and life-changing ways. Our desire is to know more of His promises, to be blessed even more by God, so that He is always before us and we set our minds on Him rather than the things of this world (Ps. 16.8; Col. 3.1-3).

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As we grow in friendship with the Lord, He unfolds more of His covenant with us – His precious and very great promises, which are in Jesus (Gen. 12.1-3; cf. 2 Cor. 1.20). This is the second great privilege of those who enjoy His friendship, the increase in blessedness and in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

Such growth in the Lord and His promises increases the wellbeing we experience in our souls and prepares us for making friends for Jesus in our Personal Mission Field.

Making friends for Jesus

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. This is the third way our friendship with Jesus is expressed.

As we grow in the Lord our confidence in Him increases, and we readily take up our calling to be His witnesses, in our words as well as our deeds. Talking about Jesus flows naturally from us as we live for Him, showing His love and doing good for others, beginning with our fellow disciples (Gal. 6.10). We want to make friends for Jesus, and we will do so – not perfectly, and not in every case – as we show ourselves friendly to the people to whom God sends us each day (Prov. 18.24).

Restoring all things for God's glory

Finally, our friendship with Jesus will be evident as we devote ourselves to *restoring the world* He has reconciled to the Father by His life, death, resurrection, and reign (2 Cor. 5.19). We are ambassadors for Christ and His Kingdom (2 Cor. 5.20). We want to take every thought captive to obey Him (2 Cor. 10.3-5), bring His goodness to light in our world (Gen. 1.31; Ps. 27.13), do all things in ways that manifest His Presence with us and bring glory to His Name (1 Cor. 10.31), and redeem all the time of our lives for wisdom (Eph. 5.15-17).

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.

We'll know that we are truly learning when, in our daily 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. Then we will know that we are His disciples, indeed.

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. Meditate 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, amid busy crowds, 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.

Disciples are always learners; so the Lord Jesus was always teaching them.

Thus, not only was Jesus' *teaching* of this informal, as-you-are-going nature, so was His disciples' *learning*. True learning occurs during 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.

Learning is validated in life and action, words and deeds. We are always in situations where we can bring to completion or reinforce something we are learning by what we say or do. We will make more progress in true learning if we take up this practice, and if we encourage one another in 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 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 apply His Word to the various situations and opportunities of our lives. *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

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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 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 won'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.

Jesus is ready to provide mercy and grace to help in all our times of need (Heb. 4.16). And since we need His mercy and grace at *all* times, maintaining an attitude of prayer and open channels of communion with Him will help to ensure that when our discipleship is on the line in some situation – when we have an opportunity to put into practice that which we have been learning about Jesus – the mercy and grace we need will be available to us without fail.

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 are 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. And we will encourage our fellow disciples to practice what they're learning just as we are.

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.

Jesus will teach us in the as-you-are-goings of our lives if we are diligent to wait on Him. 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 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.

Put simply, we will not experience true learning until we humble ourselves before the Lord. That means embracing our calling, committing our selves to the work of making disciples, and waiting on Him for the grace we need.

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 the Lord promises 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 we 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. True disciples cultivate the virtue of humility because they know assuredly that they are sinners in need of grace.

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 being and making disciples are bearing so little fruit. Only when God's people 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).

We won't get beyond our sins into the life of full discipleship and disciple-making until we acknowledge and repent of our sins and chart a new course for our lives (Rom. 12.21). But what is sin, and how does it find its way into our lives?

Sin

We may think of sin in two ways. First, as *The Westminster Catechism* has it, sin "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). Sin is breaking the Law of God or failing to fulfill what it requires.

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

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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, trusting in the Lord and leaning on His Word, then there is a very good possibility that this, whatever it is, 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, because the Law of God – the core curriculum of God's indwelling Spirit (Ezek. 36.26, 27) – both shows us our sin and illuminates the path of true discipleship. Ignore or neglect the Law of God, and you will never learn to love as God intends (Matt. 24.12), and you will never truly learn Jesus, Who fulfilled all God's Law.

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 Him (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. Guardrails on a highway keep us from veering off into danger on one side or the other. 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 – and genuine discipleship – 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 express 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, encouraging our fellow disciples, 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 Law: His covenant and testimonies. By keeping between these guardrails, we may learn the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord.

God's promises

Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ gladly embrace and eagerly seek to know the precious and very great promises of God which are in Him, and which draw us into participation in God (2 Pet. 1.4; 2 Cor. 1.20). 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 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 partake of the divine being, of Christ Himself, because all the promises of God are fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ. 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. He is our blessing, and He will bless the people in our world with His grace and truth. 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 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.

True Learning

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 sin (Rom. 3.20) as well as how to love God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40). Neglect the Law, and you won't have enough love to make disciples of anyone, including yourself (Matt. 24.12).

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 by doing the good works sketched out in the Law of God. 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 true learning is only deceiving himself about the efficacy of his Christian educational activities and the reality of his discipleship.

True learning follows the path which is marked out by God's covenant and Law, and true learners keep to this path, guarding it 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? Encourage a fellow disciple today with the promises of God and teaching of His Law.

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

All disciples are learners. All disciples encourage other disciples for true learning, for learning Jesus. True learning can only be accomplished by the Lord Himself. Unless He shows us the way, teaches us how to follow Jesus, empowers us for obedience, 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.

Reading, study, preaching, teaching, and other means of instruction are all important, especially our own time poring over the Word of God. But these are all avenues that lead us into the Presence of Jesus, the Master Teacher. He alone can grant us the learning we need to grow as disciples and in making disciples of others.

Begin with the Word

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

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 can prepare us for every good work, so that we may demonstrate the transforming grace of Jesus in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

But the primary reason for reading and studying God's Word is to see Jesus and to partake of His Presence and glory. Jesus is the theme of all Scripture (Jn. 5.39). If we miss Him in our reading and study, we fall short of His intention for us. The Spirit of God opens the Scripture to us, showing us the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 4.6). Then He applies that glory to areas of our soul and life, transforming us increasingly into the likeness of Jesus.

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; Acts 14.17). God is revealing Himself and His will in all kinds of ways, all day long. His goodness is in all the earth (Ps. 33.5), and He calls us to set our minds on it (Phil. 4.8). And as we become more firmly grounded in His Word, we'll be able to *see* and *hear* Him, making Himself known in the works of His hands (Ps. 36.9).

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

Next steps – Transformation: Review your time in God's Word. How can you improve this? What can you add of reading or study in general revelation to enhance your experience of true learning?

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

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Thank you.

