

What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? What does it mean to follow in His footsteps, to live as He did? We can focus on what Jesus did, but it is also important to understand why He did it. What motivated Jesus to live as He did, serving humanity and taking on the sins of the world? It was His relationship to the Father, and His attitude toward submission is one that we must emulate if we hope to follow Him. Let's spend some time this week working toward that goal.

Day 1

Test the Spirits

For us to clothe ourselves with Christ, to have his mind, heart, and spirit, we must test the thoughts that occur to us to see which ones to amplify and which ones to reject. Thoughts occur to us continually throughout the day, and it is anybody's guess where they come from. In modern times, we mostly view these as originating with some kind of chemical change within our brains, which doesn't really help, because we can then ask why the chemical change occurred and so forth, to an endless reduction. In ancient times, the idea had more to do with the influence of various spirits, and those influences could be welcomed or rejected, meaning we could choose to dwell on those thoughts or reject them. While this view of the world might be spooky to a modern person, it may not be as irrational as we think. In fact, it is more rational than the modern view which puts irrational chemical processes at the heart of our thinking, while the ancient view located it in a rational spirit. Whichever is the case, the point is that unless we guard our thinking, we will fall into unhealthy behaviors that are rooted in thoughts that are contrary to the gracious reality that God has created in the world. We have all had experiences in trying to reason with someone whose mind is made up about something in a very unhealthy way, and no matter how we present facts or logic it is powerless to change their outlook. This comes from dwelling on the wrong thoughts for far too long, and all of us are susceptible to it. In fact, it is fair to say, that all of us have areas of our lives where we have engaged in this very behavior, so it is wise for us to redouble our efforts at testing the spirits, and rejecting any thought that comes to us that does not have its foundation in the love and mercy of God, and of his gracious desire to see us reconciled to himself.

Verses: 1 John 3:1-3, Romans 12:1-2, 1 John 4:1-6, Romans 12:21

Prayer Topics: Influences, Will, Intentions, Focus

Day 2

Assume Blessing

As we encounter the ups and downs of life, it is easy for us to assume that we are being punished by God for our sins, and that God's desire for us is to get even in some way for all our past indiscretions and slanders of His good name. The reality, however, is that even when God disciplines us through allowing the consequences of our bad behavior to catch up with us, it is only so that we may be chastened to return to His love. God desires to bless us, and His love for us is found in every word He has given us. Every command, every caution, and every promise contained in His word is for our benefit. His love for us is completed or perfected in our obedience, so He desires to see us obey. When we disobey, we often receive grace in that the consequence for our disobedience is deferred. Sometimes, however, that deferment is not in our best interest, so God graciously allows us to live the consequences of rejecting Him, His love, and His life in our disobedience, so that we might return to Him with renewed and deeper understanding of His love. In all the circumstances of your life, do you assume blessing? Do you assume it is from the loving hand of a kind and gracious father, or do you see it as the hand of anger and rejection? Jesus took on the sins of the world, the punishment that was due those sins, and the distance and forsakenness that came with it, not because the Father hated Him, but because the Father loved

Him. Can we trust in the love of the Father, and the blessing He intends, amid troubles and difficulties? This turns a circumstance that could lead to distance into one that brings us closer to the Father.

Verses: James 1:17, Philippians 4:19, Isaiah 41:13

Prayer Topics: Grace, Discipline, Gratitude

Day 3

Magnify Wisely

It is not an uncommon trait for us to magnify circumstances beyond what is warranted. When we receive news of a setback, it is not uncommon to be devastated rather than concerned. When we see a fault in our character, it is not uncommon for us to believe that we are flawed beyond redemption, rather than the project of a God who has the power to redeem all things. When someone sins against us, it is easy for us to see them as completely against us, rather than just a little insensitive. We tend to magnify evil while minimizing good, leading us to doubt God's ability to bring redemption and salvation to the world. We often see the power and pervasiveness of evil as something that is beyond the power of God to reverse or even curtail. We focus on our own sin to the exclusion of the goodness of God. While both exist, one is clearly more powerful than the other, although our thoughts often betray this truth. So how do we begin to magnify the power of the goodness of God? I think it is a mistake to start turning a blind eye to evil, so the only remaining course is to make a habit out of thinking of good, noble, excellent, and praiseworthy things. This will always lead us back to God. While this advice is simple, it is not easy to do. It is a very difficult thing to put aside time each day to meditate on the glory of God. It seems unproductive. It feels like spending time combating evil through action would be much more worthwhile. In the end, however, I think that the transformation that occurs through meditating on what is good allows us to be more effective in the time that is left. Spend some time today magnifying the goodness of God, it will be worth your time.

Verses: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 119:148, Psalm 1:1-6

Prayer Topics: Attention, Perspective, Consistency

Day 4

Be Patient

How big of a failure are you? Are you tired of it? Good! You may think my next point is to stop your failure and get on with being a success, but it isn't. My next point is, in fact, to be patient with your failure. As human beings we are sinners, and try as we might to reach the ideal of perfection, we will not do that in this lifetime. We will always have our faults and flaws, and it is good to have the proper perspective on them, not magnifying them too greatly, but always being aware of them and putting effort into the transformation of our sanctification. We must learn to be patient with our failure, and understand that God will be faithful in completing the task of glorifying us. If we become too impatient with our faults and flaws it is easy to become frustrated and to let that frustration end up in a bad attitude toward ourselves or, eventually, toward others and ultimately toward God. God makes all things beautiful and glorious in His time, and he has given us this time of being in between our terrible past of sin and failure and our glorious future of unity with Him for a purpose. There is much that needs to be redeemed in us, and not all of it can be done without the transforming effect of struggle and the patience that its continued presence requires. Trust in God for a moment is one thing, trust over time is something else entirely. Goodness is worth the effort over the long haul. God knows it, we need to learn it.

Verses: Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:12, 2 Timothy 2:15

Prayer Topics: Taking Responsibility, Humility, Endurance

Day 5

Personalize Appropriately

We are always the star of our own personal movie, because the only perspective we can have is our own. And while it is good to try to put yourself in the shoes of others, and see things from a different perspective, it is always the perspective of you trying to see things as someone else through imagination, not reality. Having said that, there is an unhelpful tendency to personalize everything, meaning to see everything as being about us. Just this morning I heard a horn honk and wondered what I had done to garner this response, then immediately realized it had nothing to do with me at all. And that is most of life, isn't it? Our own story is just a small part of the world, and most things do not concern us at all. This is a great blessing, as we would be completely overwhelmed if it were any other way. This limited scope of our lives allows us to focus on our relationship to God, on praising and glorifying him, and on those around us that we have personal relationships with. The weight of the world, and all its problems, are on God, not us. Focus on what you have control over, and life will be much simpler. Personalize God's love for you, being drawn into the everlasting relationship between Father and Son, but do not personalize the world, for it comes with the appearance of endless glory, but ends with an overwhelming responsibility that is too big to bear.

Verses: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28-30, Hebrews 12:1-2

Prayer Topics: Wisdom, Scope, Yoke