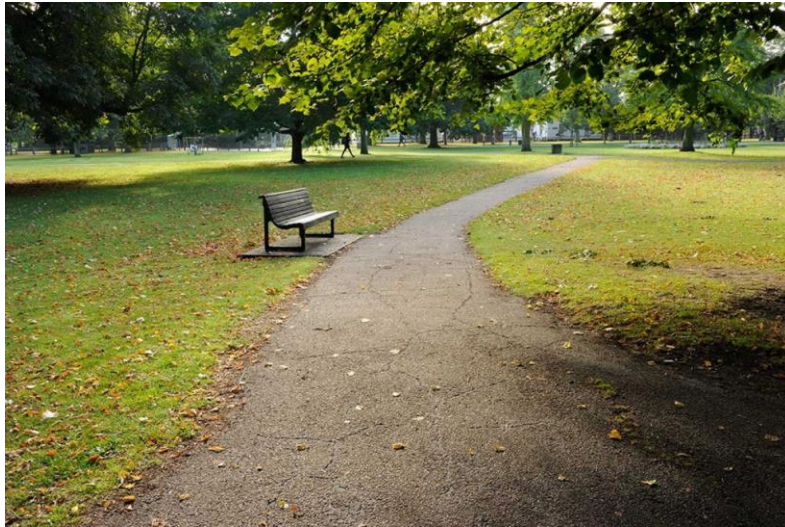


DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAYS

Calvary United Methodist Church

January 2018



What does it mean to be a follower of Christ?

What does it mean “to become disciples of Jesus Christ”? A *disciple* is a follower or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to set out on the path to become more and more like Jesus, especially when it comes to how we relate to God and one another.

The church plays a big role in discipleship. Discipleship is a team effort rather than a solo endeavor. We learn what it means to follow Jesus Christ by being in community with other disciples. In this community of faith, we see how others love and so we might choose to be loving. We are inspired by the example of those who have lived each day with the hope and trust we wish to have ourselves. We receive encouragement and guidance from the faithful who are a little further down the path of discipleship. And here, in this community of less than perfect people, we also learn what it is to recognize our own brokenness and sin and the forgiveness and renewal that God can provide.

There are at least five main pathways that have over and over again been found to be helpful in the process of Christian discipleship. Following each of pathways will enable persons to and closer and closer to God in Christ. Each path is helpful in itself, but taken together these five pathways are even more better.

Worship and prayer

Learning and study

Sharing faith/Witness

Serving God and Serving Others

Generosity and Giving

The idea is that we grow and mature and develop over time. Our spiritual life is not to be static or stagnant. We should not expect our spiritual life to always be the same. Instead we are always involved in becoming more and more like Christ so that who we were yesterday is not the same as we are today and who we will become will be different, in some ways, than who we are today. That's what John Wesley called, "Going on to perfection."

The church can help people grow in their walk with Christ through practicing and promoting each of these pathways. In this way, we are accomplishing our mission "to seek and invite all to become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of our community and our world."

1. Worship and Prayer

One of the paths is through WORSHIP and PRAYER. When we worship God, we are opening ourselves that we might encounter the living God. As we offer thanks, give God praise, sing and listen we are sharing with others in actions that open our hearts and lift our spirits to experience more of God. Worship is most often done with others. "

When we come together with others who are also seeking God, we are much more likely to find what we are seeking. The worship and praise offered by others helps me to be more worshipful than I would be by myself. Music, the reading of scripture, the sermon, the sacraments and even the act of gathering together with others can lead us to a closer connection with God.

Prayer is a closely related practice to worship. Prayer is not only talking to God and sharing our thoughts and needs. It is also listening and paying attention to the ways that God might be communicating or stirring something in us. In both worship and prayer, we place ourselves before God with the hope and expectation that God will meet us in some way.

Questions to consider:

- Do I take time to give thanks for the many blessings that have come my way?
- Do I make room in my busy life to be with others in a place and time that lifts my heart and spirit to focus on God?
- In what ways can I foster a conversation with God?

2. Serving God and Serving Others

Many people might argue that a person is most like Jesus when he or she preach as Jesus preached, teach as Jesus taught, heal as Jesus healed, or perform miracles just as Jesus performed miracles. This makes sense if we look at the outward aspects of what Jesus did. But if we look a little deeper to see the motivations that lie behind what Jesus did, we see the motivation that lies underneath the action. Jesus' motivation was always to **serve to God through serving other** (Matthew 20:28).

God has called each of us to serve other people just as Jesus served. When we serve others, we bring praise and honor to God's name. We bring glory to God by the ways in which show love and consideration for the people around us. We bring our motivations in line with Jesus's motivations and so we also grow to be more and more like him.

Our actions become a catalyst for spiritual growth and Christian discipleship. Acts of kindness and service not only help others, they also help us to be more faithful. They are a pathway that leads to life in Jesus Christ.

Questions to consider:

- What is something I can today do that shows care and consideration to someone else I know or meet?
- If someone were watching you this week, would they know you are a Christian by what they see you do?

3. Learning and study

Faith often grows as we read and study the Bible along with other believers. The Bible is the record of God's actions and words to humanity over time. Christians have long held that reading and studying the Bible can bring us into a growing relationship with the author and subject of scripture.

¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The fuller meaning of the Bible gets unpacked when we read it with others in a community of faith. When we read the Bible along with other people, tell our names and hear the stories of others, share our questions, our concerns and our experience with others, faith grows in us.

We really can't make much use of the Bible by ourselves in isolation. When we participate in a small group where others come to know us and we know others, faith can take room and grow.

Questions to consider:

- Where do others know you well? What does it mean to be known by others?
- How might you find ways to read the Bible and feed your spiritual growth?

4. Generosity and Giving

Still another pathway to a fuller life in Jesus Christ has to do with how we give. Jesus spent a great deal of time talking about money. That may seem strange. Actually, money has a rather strong influence on us. Sometimes the best way to become a more faithful as a follower of Jesus Christ is to turn our attention away from the making and spending money.

When we learn to use what we've been given to accomplish some God-sized projects, we grow in our discipleship. When we learn to share what we have with others, we find that our heart grows larger, not smaller. Generosity comes as we open our hands and our hearts to offer blessing to others in the spirit of Jesus. Generosity is characterized by giving and sharing that is practiced:

1. something that we make a regularly part of our life
2. something that actually has a cost to the giver
3. something we intentionally plan to do

Being more open-handed leads us to be more open-hearted. When we are generous, we become more like the One who shows us what true generosity looks like

Questions to consider:

- Do I give regularly or haphazardly?
- Do I stop to prayerfully consider what I give?
- What would it look like to give with a more open hand?

5. Sharing Faith/Witness

A fifth pathway of Christian discipleship is sharing faith with others. Another way to put this is to call it "witnessing." Simply put, this is telling others about God's love and the good news of Jesus Christ. We learn best when we share with other people. When I learned how to bake an apple pie, I wasn't really a baker until I'd shared the pie with others. When I was first learning to play the guitar, I was only entertaining myself and the dog (sometimes) until I took the step to play the guitar for others to hear. Faith in Jesus Christ comes alive when we share that faith with others.

We each have ways that we can tell others about what God is doing. When you find a new restaurant that you enjoy or discover a show on television that you love, you naturally want to tell others. When we experience the good news of God's love and grace in our lives, we will naturally want to pass that on to others. There are various ways that each of us can learn to make that sharing more natural and easy for us.

One of the best ways to get started in witnessing our faith is simply to start praying for someone you know that may need more of God's love and joy and peace in their lives. Then, when it feels right, ask God to give you an opportunity to let that person know you are praying for him or her. This can be a wonderful way to share.

Questions to consider:

- Who do you know that you can be praying for the next few days or weeks?
- Are there some natural places that you might say something about your faith to others you know?

A Disciple of Jesus Christ:

