

Radical Minimum Standard – Week 1 A Vision for Discipleship

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The other day I was on the internet and came across an advertisement to sign up for a MasterClass. I followed the link and saw that for a small fee, I could sign up to learn about a variety of fields from the very best people alive. I could have Steph Curry teach me about a jump shot. Serena Williams teaches a class on how to play tennis, and Simone Biles teaches one on the fundamentals of gymnastics. I could take a class with Joanna Gaines on art and design, Gordon Ramsey on cooking, Samuel Jackson on acting, or Usher on how to perform on stage. For a small fee, you can enroll in a MasterClass and learn whatever you want to learn from the best in the field. What a time to be alive. What a time to be a student. Did you know that for the last 2,000 years, Jesus has been offering a master class, not on random topics that may be of niche interest, but on life, and enrollment is open to anyone who would want to learn from him? This is really good news.

Mark 1 tells us about the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus said, "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). Right after Jesus said that the kingdom of God was near and that people should believe in him, he saw two young men, Simon and Andrew, and he said to them, "Come, follow me" (Mark 1:17). This is the invitation that Jesus is extending to all of us—to (1) recognize that God is near and actively involved in the world, (2) to renounce living life the way we have been living it, and (3) to follow Jesus, which means to live in his shadow, sit under his tutelage, and not only learn from him how to live life at its very best, but also, with his help, begin to put his example into practice, to become like him.

If I started taking guitar lessons, I wouldn't expect to just show up, watch my instructor play the instrument, and be moved and inspired by the music. Nothing negative would come from that, but it wouldn't help me play any better. I'd have to do a lot more than just show up and watch and listen; I'd have to begin implementing what he taught me. I'd have to start practicing, and if I did, slowly but surely, I would develop a skill I did not have before, and hopefully be able to play like my instructor. That's what Jesus says it is supposed to be like following him. "Everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher" (Luke 6:40). When we enroll in the master class of life with Jesus as our teacher, he doesn't expect us to just listen, take notes, learn, and pass tests. He is such a great teacher he anticipates that we will become like him.

That is Jesus' expectation for us—that we would become like him, that we would do the sorts of things that he did. Perhaps the clearest place we find this spelled out in Scripture is 1 John 2:6: "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." If you claim to believe in Jesus, that you have faith in him, you trust him, and you love him, the baseline requirement is that you live the way he lived. That's why we are calling this series *Radical Minimum Standard*—because the minimum standard is to live like Jesus, and that's an exceptionally high bar. Dallas Willard put it this way: "Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you." If Jesus were in your situation and stage of life, had your job, your friends, your family, your bank account—if he were put in your exact shoes, how would he live? What would he do? Whatever the answer is, discipleship is the path we take to do what Jesus would do in your shoes, and to do it consistently, joyfully, and spontaneously.

When you think about Christianity, is this what's on your mind? George McDonald said:

Instead of asking yourself whether you believe in Jesus or not, ask yourself whether you have this day done one thing because Jesus said, "Do it," or once abstained because Jesus said, "Don't do it." It is simply absurd to say you believe, or even want to believe in him, if you do not do anything he tells you.

That's in your face and blunt, but it's true. Let me ask you: is this your vision for faith in Jesus? That Jesus is in charge of your life and you want to learn to live like him? As I was growing up, we went to church nearly every Sunday. We learned that there is a God who made the world, that he loved us, that Jesus came to the world to die for our sins, and that we should believe in him. Believing in him had two primary implications: be a good person (do nice things not bad things) and tell others about him (help others become Christians, too). Those aren't wrong—Christians probably should be nice, and we should tell others about Jesus—but there is so much more! As we follow Jesus, he wants to see every aspect of our lives transformed to become more like him.

We spent 22 weeks studying the gospel of Matthew together from Christmas to Easter. Last week, we celebrated Jesus' rising from the grave, and we talked about what that means for our lives today. After Jesus rose from the grave, he continued to appear to his disciples. He spoke with them and interacted with them for forty days. Matthew 28 tells us about one of those interactions.

Then Jesus came to (the eleven disciples) and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

After Jesus rose from the grave, conquered death, came back to life, and changed history forever, what did he tell his disciples to do? Go and make disciples. With all the authority in the galaxies, with his final words, Jesus gathered up his followers and said, "I want you to go and make disciples, to teach and train other people how to live life like I have showed you. Don't just seek converts. Make disciples. The goal isn't merely to change people's minds, but to change their lives." Jesus told them exactly how they were to make disciples: *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. Talk about a radical minimum standard. Jesus finished the master class and said, "Everything I've commanded you—not most, not the vast majority, but everything I've commanded you—I want you to do!" Is that your goal for your life: to honor everything Jesus said, and with his help, put it into practice?

CS Lewis said, "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time." This is the purpose of the church: to make disciples. That's why our vision is to connect people to Jesus, and our mission is to love God, love people, and make disciples. We want to connect you to Christ, and see you become like Christ. That's what we are here for! Listen to the way the Apostle Paul wrote about this in his letters. In Galatians 4:19, he said, "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...." What's the goal? Christ in you. Discipleship. Spiritual maturity. How committed was Paul to that end? "In the pains of childbirth." That's extreme. I watched Keren endure nine months of excruciating discomfort to bring each of our kids to life. Keren has hyperemesis, which is like extreme morning sickness with nausea and vomiting, and she had it for all nine months. She is also anemic and hypoglycemic, which means if she doesn't have enough iron, protein, and sugar in her system, she shuts down and passes out. Imagine the catch-22 when your body desperately needs these resources, but every time you eat you end up vomiting all your food. Then of course, there is the actual delivery. I can't put into words what I watched as a husband in terms of the price Keren paid to give our children life. Paul says that's what he was willing to endure to see the people in this church come to spiritual life.

Paul says something similar to the Colossians: "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29). Again, what's the goal? "That we may present everyone fully mature in Christ." Complete discipleship. What

was Paul willing to do to bring this spiritual maturity about? “To this end I strenuously contend.” The word Paul uses here in Greek is *agonizomenos*. He’s willing to embrace agonizing toil to see people become disciples! It’s a huge price, but it’s worth it!

The effort isn’t only supposed to be put in by him, the teacher of discipleship, but by us, the recipients of discipleship! In the book of 1 Timothy, Paul was writing to a young man who he was discipling and mentoring in the faith. Paul gave Timothy this admonition: “Train yourself to be godly” (1 Timothy 4:7). The word translated “train” is *gymnose*, from which we get our English word gymnasium. People don’t go to a gym to take a nap. They don’t go to a gym to kick up their feet and watch TV, or to scroll on social media for two hours. They go there to put in the work. They sweat. They grind. They hit the weights and the machines and get their bodies in shape. That’s the mentality and mindset we need when it comes to growing as disciples. We want to train to be godly!

We must be willing to put in the work. Most of the people in this room today, maybe not everyone, but a majority certainly, if I asked, “Do you want to be like Jesus in every area of your life? Do you want to have unbroken intimacy with God the Father like Jesus does? Do you want to have the spiritual power and authority he exhibited throughout his life? Do you want to love people the way he loved people, do you want his wisdom, his graciousness, his kindness?”—you would say yes. If that was life at its best, we would say we want that kind of life. We would say we want it, but we are not truly committed to experiencing it. *Many Christians today wish to experience the blessings that come from a life of devoted discipleship while in practice living a life of distraction and sloth.* We say we want to be disciples, but we don’t do anything to become disciples. Wanting to become more like Jesus is just as effective at making us more like Jesus as wanting to become a great violinist is at turning you into a great violinist. In the end, it’s not what we say we want that matters, it’s what we prioritize; it’s the actual energy, effort and commitment we put in.

I’m here to tell you—it’s worth the effort! The Jesus way of life is the best, most worthy, most admirable way of life possible. No one chooses the path of Jesus and ends up regretting it. But we will inevitably regret choosing the other options set before us. William Irvine put it like this:

There is a danger that you will mislive—that despite all your activity, despite all the pleasant diversions you might have enjoyed while alive, you will end up living a bad life. There is, in other words, a danger that when you are on your deathbed, you will look back and realize that you wasted your one chance at living. Instead of spending your life pursuing something genuinely valuable, you squandered it because you allowed yourself to be distracted by the various trinkets life has to offer.

What a powerful warning. There is a danger that we could mis-live this one life we’ve been given. Instead of pursuing that which is most valuable—knowing God, bringing him glory, advancing his kingdom, impacting eternity, we get caught up with and consumed with little trinkets along the way. We become experts at video games, or golf, or interior design, or beauty tips, but we are infants in grace, truth, wisdom, and righteousness. We can’t afford to make that error. We must come to Jesus and plead with him to teach us how to live!

This is really what the entire Bible is pushing us toward. The word “Christian”—someone who believes in Jesus—is used three times in the Bible. The word “disciple”—someone who has become an apprentice of Jesus, who is committed to becoming like Jesus—is used 269 times. This is what Jesus is looking for! I have a good friend named Chad who a few years ago made the commitment to shift from being a believer to a disciple. I asked him to reflect on his transformation. This is what he said:

The impact of discipleship on my life is impossible to express in words let alone a single paragraph. I'm emotional even thinking about how I have been changed and so blessed that others disciplined me and lived out what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission in Matthew 28. These people directed me to Christ and poured into my life. Not only has their discipleship impacted my life, but through them God has also changed my marriage, my kids, my friends, and my coworkers. The impact is generational. As I reflect, there is no doubt the most sanctifying seasons of growth in my life have all occurred during the most intentional seasons of discipleship. I will always thank God for the people who took the time and loved me enough to show me what it looks like to become more like the Jesus I have placed my faith in.

That's what we want to happen at The Creek! We want that to be the tangible reality for everyone who is in our church!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of the most influential figures in Christianity of the last 100 years. He was born in Germany to very privileged and highly educated parents. He excelled in everything he put his hand to, and in his late teenage years began to study theology. He eventually came to the US, surrendered his life to Christ and was gaining a lot of influence for his mixture of intellect and passion. Then his home country began to fall into disrepair. He could have stayed in America and enjoyed a path of safety and religious prestige, but he chose to return to Germany and try to make a difference. When Hitler kicked all Jewish people and Jewish pastors out of the church in Germany, Bonhoeffer led a resistance movement. He said, "We have to raise up a church powerful enough to withstand the deception of Hitler and the cunningness of his evil agenda." So he formed a small seminary in the Finkenwalde region of Germany, about 45 miles northeast of Berlin. There he trained a few dozen students who wanted to be part of training a resistance church. Every day the students spent hours studying the Bible and hours in prayer. They made a covenant to live by the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. It was a rigorous and encompassing experience. One day one of Bonhoeffer's friends came to visit him to catch up and see what was happening at the seminary. After observing what was going on he pulled Bonhoeffer aside and commended him for his zeal and effort but then said, "I think this is a little too intense. You need to dial it back a bit." Bonhoeffer looked at his buddy and said, "Come with me." He took him in a rowboat across the lake, then hiked up a hill to overlook where the Nazis were training their soldiers. They observed the drills, the exercise, and the indoctrination. Then he said, "Do you see what's happening there? This must be stronger than that!"

This is our vision, our hope, our prayer!