

An abstract painting with warm, earthy tones of orange, yellow, and brown. The background is textured with visible brushstrokes and layered colors. In the lower right, there are faint, dark outlines of human figures, possibly a group of people, rendered in a sketchy, expressive style. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

**BOAZ ADHENGO**  
**DISCIPLESHIP**



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# **DISCIPLESHIP**



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## PREFACE

At the time of compiling this book, my son has suffered a car accident, broke a leg and is healing at home. This adds up to the consistent turmoil that my psyche has had to cope up with, yet am thankful for life, always knowing that God works all things for the good.

Someone once asked me if I know of any witch who lives a rich life; and this shocked me. All the movies ever watched, show them as living in dilapidated houses; in my rural village, those known to practice occultism are often poor, be it materially or spiritually, yet they claim to be able to solve other people's problems. The truth is that blessings can only come unto the righteous, and that blessings are given only by God to the favoured through the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, the best phrase to use is "fruits of the spirit" which is discussed later in the book.

The major barrier to learning something new is not intellectual but emotional; and a closer look at the strength in all we do is seen to be love. The opposite is hate, to which laments climax and emotions become distorted; yet God's word will comfort at all times, for the Lord God, goes before us, and is with us.

The goal of teaching God's word is not just to inform but to transform; and in this thought, am intrigued into developing yet another tool that can spark appetites of curiosity. Hitherto, faith begins with curiosity, for we are created to relate; first with God then with others. Relationships thus provide an opportunity to a gospel worth believing in.

Important to note is that a person's ability to believe in God will be greatly impacted by his or her psychological and cognitive development; and this is why proper upbringing of children translates to God fearing, wise mature individuals. As a matter of fact, each stage of human life presents a psychological crisis and a person has to face these critical challenges on a *step-by-step* ascension, for they define the pace of maturity. Different tasks will help manage the various stages of crisis as experienced in age; and all these processes will eventually be meaningful to be seen as attitudes, thoughts, values, motivation or even behaviours. All depending on how we chose to respond to the very changes we experience in our own living, as families or individuals. We must own our beliefs before we master them.

Discipleship is the overarching ministry that takes an individual from a state of unbelief to become a fully devoted follower of Christ. Our goal is to guide others towards having faith integrated in all aspects of their life; and in this book, we will

explore just that. How do we begin and what could be the incremental way to share in this love of Christ.

1 Peter 3:15 “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*”.

Human soul and the Word of God are the only two things that last forever; importantly, we must understand that we are living in a broken relationship with God, once created for perfection but because of sin, we are now broken. Thus, salvation is a free gift offered to all people who seek forgiveness by accepting Christ Jesus.

This book begins with the story of Job, expounding a bit softly on the concept of human soul as we relate to life and its challenges, then brightens on the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit, the *Word of God*. To be a disciple is something we are called to become and not what we do; it is inherently part of our living. The Christian life is one of a faithful surrender; hitherto, sharing about Jesus begins with our lifestyle and what is happening in our hearts.

It is my hope that this book will achieve the purpose to which God intended it to become; yet my prayer for even an encouraged heart as you read through the pages, that you will not only be informed but also ignited to even transform your heart and those of others.

Ideas build on other ideas, and love grows when shared to even the strange or undeserving. Having read what other books on discipleship have presented, I can only pray that my addition into the already consolidating flavours will add yet another acre in God’s Kingdom, to win even the unchurched through what others would rather call nature vs. nature; the humble entice for love.

# 1

## Dilemma of Suffering



To better understand this chapter, we will look at the dilemma of suffering in the life of Job. The story of Job confronts us with the question: Why do good people suffer? And the story offers us insight into right and wrong ways to pursue the answer to this question. The suffering of Job points us forward to the ultimate answer to the problem of evil - the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ and the promise of a world made new. And as Jesus' followers, we seek to alleviate suffering as we walk alongside others.

To live is to suffer. All of us, regardless of our economic status, our health, our diet, or our skills, suffer. Whatever our worldview, our beliefs about God, or our stance on good and evil, we all will face some kind of trial and suffering in this life.

The question is not if we will suffer, but how we respond to suffering when it happens. Will we suffer toward God (*allow our suffering to drive us to Him*), or will we suffer away from God (*allow our suffering to hinder our relationship with Him*)?

In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, we find the story of Job - the classic story on pain and suffering. Even many people unfamiliar with the Bible know the basics of Job's story, how everything was taken from him and how he remained devoted to God. The New Testament lifts up Job as one of our examples of patience and endurance (*James 5:10*). Job suffered toward God and found that suffering gave him a greater understanding of God and His ways.

When our lives are comfortable and easy, we don't tend to think deeply about God. But when suffering comes, we "zoom in" on God. What we discover is that God is working our suffering for good and bringing about exquisite beauty and glory from even our deepest pain (*Rom. 8:18,28*). We discover, like Job, that God is

even greater than we thought, and His goodness is even deeper than we ever dared to dream.

Job was an extremely rich and successful man who lived in a land called Uz. By today's standards, he could be compared to someone like Bill Gates: unimaginably wealthy and greatly respected and admired in society for being a good man.

Job had a large family; seven sons and three daughters and he owned extensive flocks of livestock. He was 'blameless' and 'upright,' always careful to avoid sinning. One day, Satan visited God in heaven. God boasted to Satan about Job's goodness and Satan challenged God, claiming that Job was only good because God had given him many blessings. Satan said that if God gave him permission to punish Job, he would certainly turn away from God and curse Him. God granted Satan permission to torment Job to test Satan's claim, but he told Satan that he was not allowed to physically harm Job in the process.

In just one day, Job received four messages, each giving him awful news. He learned that all of his livestock, servants, and ten children had died due to invaders and natural disasters. Crushed by the news, Job tore his clothes and shaved his head in mourning, but still he honoured and blessed God in his prayers.

Satan returned to heaven again, to request permission to test Job further. God granted Satan another chance at testing Job, and allowed that Satan could cause physical suffering to Job, but must not take away his life. Satan afflicted Job with agonizing, weeping skin sores all over his body. Seeing how mercilessly he suffered, even Job's wife encouraged him to curse God and to give up and die, but Job refused to turn his back on God, and instead entered a struggle to accept his difficulties.

*Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar*, three of Job's friends went to visit him. To support Job in his grief, they sat in silence with him for

seven days. On the seventh day, Job began to speak, and the four of them shared their thoughts about Job's afflictions. Job cursed the day he was born! *Eliphaz* replied that Job, who had comforted many other people, must have never really understood their pain. *Eliphaz* told Job that his suffering must be due to some sin he committed, and he encouraged Job to seek God's forgiveness and favour. *Bildad* and *Zophar* agreed that Job must have done evil and offended God; they urged him to resolve to live a more blameless life from now on. *Bildad* claimed that Job's children probably brought their deaths upon themselves. *Zophar* even suggested that Job may even have deserved a far greater punishment than what he had already suffered, for whatever wrongs he had committed.

Job became upset at his friends' remarks. He insisted that, in spite of their accusations, he really had lived a good and blameless life in the service of God and his fellow man. He began to ponder God's relationship with man. He could not make sense of why God judged people by their actions if He could just as easily change or forgive their behaviour. As he had been so badly afflicted, in spite of living an honourable, life devoted to God, he was at a loss to see how humans can please God and gain His justice. God is unseen, Job said, and God's ways are beyond human understanding. Job claimed that people cannot persuade God with words. Job desperately wished for someone who could be a go-between between himself and God, or for God to end his suffering by sending him to *Sheol*, the deep place of the dead.

Job's friends were offended that he ignored and criticised their advice. Believing that Job was not being honest about his wicked actions, they stressed to him that nothing good could come of wickedness, and accused him of not being God-fearing enough. Job responded by telling them that he believed there would be a

‘witness’ or ‘Redeemer’ in heaven who would know that he was indeed an innocent man (16:19, 19:25). Distraught, Job became agitated and afraid. He lamented God’s injustice - how God let wicked people prosper while innocent people suffered. Job wanted to confront God and complain, but he was unable to physically find God to do this. He felt that wisdom was hidden from humans, but he decided to persist in searching for wisdom by fearing God and avoiding evil.

Without prompting, another friend of Job’s; a young man named *Elihu*, joined in the discussion. He too assumed that Job must have done wicked things to deserve his afflictions. He saw Job’s lengthy speech and questioning as being rebellious against God. He asserted that Job has spent too much effort vindicating himself rather than God. *Elihu* explained that God communicates with humans through visions and physical pain. He said that through physical suffering, humans can experience God’s love and forgiveness. *Elihu* concluded that, when Job recovers, he would understand that God has saved him from death (33:24).

Finally, from a whirlwind, God Himself interrupted the conversation. God demanded Job to be brave and give answers to his questions. God’s questions were rhetorical, aimed at showing Job how little he knew about creation and God’s power. God described many detailed aspects to show the extent and power of his creation, praising especially his creation of and control over two large and frightening beasts, the Behemoth and Leviathan (sometimes thought to be the hippopotamus and the crocodile, or mythical creatures). These beasts are said to represent the disorder and chaos that can be found in God’s world. Overwhelmed and humbled by the encounter with God, Job acknowledged God’s unlimited power and admitted that our human knowledge is very

limited. God was pleased with Job's response, but was upset with *Eliphaz*, *Bildad*, and *Zophar* for their poor reasoning and advice. Job stood up for his friends, and God forgave them. God restored Job to good health, gave him twice as much property as before, new children, and a very long life he lived 140 more years and saw four generations of grandchildren.

Now, let us reflect upon these key points as we understand and delve a bit more into the dilemmas of Job:

1. The Book of Job is probably the oldest book of the Bible. Many Bible scholars believe that it was written about 2000 BC.
2. You can find it in your Bible in the Old Testament, right before the Book of Psalms.
3. Job lived in the ancient land of Uz (Job 1:1), not to be confused with the fictional land of Oz.
4. He was married with ten children, and was very rich (Job 1:2-3).
5. Even though he was a godly person, Job lost his home, his children, and his health (Job 1:13-2:8).
6. Four friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu) try to comfort and help Job, but they make him feel worse than he did already.
7. Job struggles to understand why bad things happen to good people. He is sometimes angry, sometimes sad. But he always remembers that God has a plan and a place for him in heaven (Job 19:25-27).
8. Throughout the book, Job prays to God and asks a lot of questions. Finally, at the end of the book, God answers Job (Chapters 38-41).
9. Job never really gets the answers to all his questions. After all, no one can understand God completely. But Job does

realize that God can do anything, and he affirms his faith in God.

10. In the end of the story, Job is blessed with a good life, ten more children, and a long life of 140 years (Chapter 42).
11. We learn that we should be content, have faith in God, and trust God in all circumstances.
12. The key verse of the Book of Job is 1:21, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Job’s story does not answer the question of why good people suffer. But it does offer us some direction. First, Job did not suffer because God was angry with him. One of the greatest temptations for Christians is to think that suffering is a sign of God’s anger. We think: “God is paying me back!” But Job’s story reminds us that God’s anger is not why we suffer. In fact, one of the most interesting things about the conversation between God and Satan is that God is the one who brings Job into the conversation (1:8). The Lord suggested to Satan that he consider Job because of his faithfulness and integrity. God did not suggest Job to Satan because he was angry with Job. He suggested Job because He was pleased with him! God knew that Job trusted Him for reasons far deeper than cattle and oxen. He trusted God because of who He is.

Second, Job did not suffer because he had sinned. The Book of Job begins by telling us “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” (*Job 1:1*). Then, after Job’s family and livestock were taken, we read: “In all this Job did

not sin or charge God with wrong.” (v. 22). The author is clear on this issue: Job was not suffering because he sinned.

When we suffer, we often think of particular sins we’ve committed or ways we’ve faltered in our obedience. We believe that we are getting what we deserve. Usually our minds go to that one sin that we cannot seem to overcome and we blame that sin for our suffering. Our theology too often goes like this: Do good, be blessed. Do wrong, be cursed.

But Job’s story shows us something different. The righteous do suffer. The Apostle Paul suffered deeply during his ministry but said it was a source of deep joy for him (*Col. 1:24-25*). One look at the life of Jesus should quickly remind us that suffering and sin aren’t always connected. Even though He was completely sinless, Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, and rejected throughout His life.

James says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (*James. 1:2-4*). This is one of God’s great aims for us during suffering. If God takes us through a season of suffering in order to help us love and trust Him more, it will always be worth the pain.

When we suffer, we ask many questions. We ask: *Why me? What is God doing right now? What did I do to cause this? Why does suffering come to those who love God? How could a loving God allow this to happen?* Those are legitimate questions and they need good, thoughtful answers.

But what we learn from Job - who asked lots of questions - is that what we need most in times of suffering is God. We need His presence, His voice, and His nearness when we are suffering. The greatest thing God can give us when we suffer is more of Himself. Listen to what the Lord says to Job.

*And the Lord said to Job: "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it." Then Job answered the Lord and said: Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further." After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.*

*(Job 40:1-5; 42:7-9)*

What a wonderful ending to Job's story! Job received an even grander vision of God's power and goodness through his suffering. He was reminded that no one can bring accusations against Him. Job saw just how small he was in comparison to the vastness of God's glory. What's more, Job **saw** an even deeper level of God's



goodness. The Lord accepted his prayers on behalf of his friends and removed His anger from them.

If nothing else, Job learned that suffering reminds us that we are not God. Suffering has a way of humbling us and reminding us that we don't have control over our lives. Job also learned that even though suffering is often beyond our control, God comes near to us during those times.

Job's journey is both difficult and beautiful. It is difficult because we see just how deeply he suffered and what he endured. Although many of us will never experience what Job did, we shouldn't minimize our own pain and trauma when trials come our way. But Job's story is also beautiful. The way God came to Job's aid, revealed Himself, and eventually restored Job gives us hope and courage. We are reminded that God will not leave us or forsake us. He even gave us His own Son to remind us He wants the best for His people.

# 2

Connecting to Christ

In his time of suffering, Job yearned for a mediator - someone to stand between him and God. If Job only knew then what we know now! We know there is one who stands between God and man and pleads for us as a man pleads for his friends. Jesus Christ is that man; He is that friend. He said, “Greater love has no one than this; that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (*John 15:13*).

Jesus is the one who stands between us and God and lays His life down for us. We need Him. We need His love, affection, and grace. We need His friendship and Him standing up on our behalf, especially in our suffering.

And as we lean on Him, we realize our God comes close to us even in the midst of our suffering. The greatest example of this is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through Jesus, God came close to us and entered into our suffering. He suffered for us, in our place. His suffering reminds us that we never suffer alone, and that one day He will put an end to all suffering. This is our great hope and great message to the world.

The Great Commission is an audacious undertaking, all the more so given the fast and sweeping changes taking place in the broader culture. As we continue to bring the unchanging message of the Gospel to our friends and neighbours, effective approaches to discipleship become more important, especially in a world that is increasingly polarized around spiritual issues.

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And*

*behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

The command of Jesus to His disciples couldn't be clearer. There are lots of things that the church has been given permission to do through the Word of God, but precious few things that we've been specifically commanded to do. Sadly, in many ways, the church has failed at this task. Even sadder is the fact that, when she's succeeded, it's largely as an unintended by-product, not as an intentional focus.

For starters, discipleship rarely has the glamour of other ministry activities. It takes time, is rarely clean and neat, and almost always hits bumps along the way. And sadly, many don't feel equipped to do it. The call to make other disciples assumes that one has already achieved some level of discipleship personally and is capable of transferring that to someone else. To make matters worse, the professionalization of ministry has created the illusion that discipleship is something that requires advanced skill levels, seminary education, or even more foolhardy, nearly perfect lives.

Buildings come in all shapes and sizes, and can be used for many different purposes. Skyscrapers, art museums, small suburban houses, car dealerships, hospitals, and schools all look and function dramatically differently. However, one thing is consistent: they all have a solid foundation. Regardless of the eventual shape or function of the building, a solid foundation is necessary in order for the building to stand. This first step is all about establishing, or shoring up, the foundation we will build on as disciples. "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is

Jesus Christ." (*1 Corinthians 3:11*) Each of the concepts in this step is incredibly important in order to have a solid foundation. Quite literally, these concepts will be "built upon" in the steps that follow, and if any of these pieces are missing or faulty, the entire structure could come crashing down. Therefore, although these concepts may seem somewhat basic, it's vital that we take time to be sure each piece is firmly in place.

### ***Who is a Disciple?***

The most common term selected by Christian adults and church leaders alike to describe the process of spiritual growth is "*becoming more Christ-like*." More than half of practicing Christians prefer this term (54%), compared with one-quarter of non-practicing Christians (25%). Half of Protestant church leaders prefer this label (51%). The phrase also echoes the sentiments of leaders in exemplar churches, who most commonly define discipleship as "becoming more like Jesus."

Read Luke 5:27-28. What did Jesus call Levi to do? How did he respond?

Jesus calls all who desire to pursue Him to be followers of His. The word used over and over again in the Bible is "disciple." A disciple is like a student or an apprentice who models her life after her teacher. In this instance, we are called to be like Jesus. In fact, the term "Christian" literally means "little Christ." Levi had no idea what the call to follow Jesus might entail, but he knew that the destination was to be like Him. Therefore, he left everything else

behind him and followed after Jesus. This is what it means for us to follow Jesus as well.

Somehow, many in the church have gotten the idea that we can be followers of Jesus without actually being anything like Him. We change our religious designation on Facebook and go to church now and then, but our lives are not changed in any discernible way. We're followers that don't actually follow. "Little Christs" that don't have the slightest resemblance to Christ Himself!

Read and paraphrase (write in your own words) the following passages:

- Luke 6:40
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Romans 6:3-4
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Colossians 3:1-4
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 1 John 1:5-7
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

What seems to be the consistent message of these passages?

Many who call themselves Christians have lost sight of the destination. However, in this case, the destination is not a physical location or an emotional result - our destination is a Person!

### Questions for Application

1. Up until this point in your life, would you say that you are more of a fan of Jesus or a follower of His? Why do you think that?
2. In Luke 5, Levi left everything he had in order to follow Jesus. What are some things that Jesus might ask you to leave behind as you follow Him?
3. When we follow Jesus, we know the destination, but we don't know what the journey will bring. What are some of the concerns you have as you begin this journey toward Jesus?

# 3

## The Process of Salvation



Scripture to Read: Mark 1:21-45

Grace to Pray: *“Lord Jesus, help me to understand both Your holiness and grace.”*

We’ve already seen that being a disciple is a journey with a specific destination, which is Jesus Himself. However, this process of following God has a significant barrier right from the beginning: You. Genesis 1-2 records a beautiful, harmonious relationship between Creator and the created. However, Genesis 3 describes the universal problem that we’ve all inherited - namely, we’ve rebelled against the King of the Universe through our sin.

One of Jesus’ first sentences recorded in the gospels is *“Follow me.”* (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17, John 1:43) However, both Matthew and Mark are clear that this is not his first public statement.

Today we live in a perishing world. It perishes not because it can’t be reached, but for lack of vision or revelation on the part of God’s people. God wants to use us to reach a lost and dying world that has been separated from Him because of sin. Like God, we were made to live for the eternal. Unfortunately, many of God’s children have let the eternal slip out of focus and are locked into the temporal things of the world.

Read Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15. What is the first public statement that Jesus made?

Look at each part of this statement, as recorded by Mark in the ESV: “The time is fulfilled / the kingdom of God is at hand / repent / and believe in the gospel.”

### *The time is fulfilled*

For centuries, the people of God had waited for a Deliverer. From the very beginning of the story, there was the promise of One who would come and crush the work of Satan, who had originally tempted our first mother and father into sin. The promise was that there would be an offspring that would come from the woman, and that he would “*bruise [Satan’s] head, and [Satan] shall bruise his heel.*” (Genesis 3:15)

Jesus’ declaration that the “*time is fulfilled*” was effectively saying to the whole world “the wait is over.”

It can be difficult to get our heads around our own sinfulness - we largely think of ourselves as good people. However, when we understand that we have lived as citizens of the world and lived as the world lives, we have by our very nature become enemies with God. (James 4:4) If we imagine that a new king is coming and we, by our position as citizens, are his enemy, what would we do?

### *Repent*

Jesus’ call to us is simple - repent. The word literally means “*to turn*” and move in the opposite direction. It’s not a passive word, but an active one, just as if a powerful king was coming and we were his enemies! We immediately stop living in line with

kingdom of which we've always been citizens and shift our allegiance to the new kingdom, in this case, the Kingdom of God. What does that process look like? We must recognize the sin in our lives, admit it before God in prayer, leave it there with Him, and turn toward a new life that is now defined by His rule and reign.

However, as we repent, the question remains: Will the King accept our repentance and take mercy?

### *Believe the Gospel*

What is this gospel that we are to believe? What is this announcement of something that happened in history that's been done for us and will change our status forever? Read Ephesians 2:4-10 and Romans 10:9-10.

The “good news” is that we actually can have access to God through grace by faith! The rebellion that separates us from God has been paid for in Christ. Salvation and forgiveness are guaranteed simply by faith: Do you believe that Jesus came to earth, lived the perfect life you couldn't live, died the death that you deserved to die, and rose again in victory over sin, death, and hell? If you believe this by faith, you can be saved! It's as simple as that.

Simple, however, doesn't necessarily mean easy. In Romans 10, Paul makes clear the challenge: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord...*” Lordship is a designation for ownership, rule, and authority. The simple declaration that “*Jesus is Lord*” is an

overall change of allegiance - He is asking us to move from one rule and authority to another.

Many want to declare that “*Jesus is Lord,*” but they want to remain in charge of their own lives. They want to be followers who don’t follow; members of a Kingdom, but remain their own king. However, out of love for us, Jesus won’t allow us to do that. He knows that we are lousy at being lords, and that the best way that we can engage His life is through His rule and reign. He doesn’t ask us for perfection, but He does ask for us to determine that He will be Lord over all of our lives.

So before Jesus ever asked the disciples to follow Him, He showed them the only way that they would be able to follow and asked them to consider the cost of making such a statement. They did, and left everything behind to follow their Lord. He asks us to consider the same thing.

Questions for Application:

1. Have you ever determined that Jesus would be Lord of your life? How has that been different than simply believing in Him?
2. Read Luke 14:25-33. What might it cost you to obey Jesus? Be as specific as you can.
3. Take some time to pray as you consider this call to repentance and lordship. Are you willing to turn from the ways of the world around you, as Jesus calls you to obey Him? Just like the disciples, you won’t know everything that decision means until you actually follow Him.

However, as you consider the cost at the outset, are you willing to follow Him, imperfectly but as completely as you can, by faith? Take time to journal your thoughts at the beginning of this journey - this decision is truly foundational to all that will follow.

# 4

Holiness

Scripture to Read: Mark 2:1-17

Grace to Pray: *“Lord Jesus, develop in me a hunger and love for Your Word.”*

Jesus invited His first disciples into the Kingdom of God through the act of repentance, and then called them to follow Him. For three years, they left everything behind them and actively followed Jesus, listening to His teaching, getting insight into His daily behaviour, watching Him interact with all of those around Him. They saw Him confront the Pharisees, heal the man born blind, raise Lazarus from the grave, feed the multitudes with a little boys’ lunch, and sneak away early in the morning and late at night to meet with the Father. In the end, they watched Him face a brutal death on the cross, watched His body be laid in a tomb. They were among the first witnesses to His glorious resurrection, and were able to hear His own explanation of all that had happened. Two of them even got to walk several miles with Him while He explained the entire story of God and how it culminated in the resurrection. (Luke 24:13-35)

With all of that in mind, it makes perfect sense that Jesus’ command to them immediately prior to returning to heaven was to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” They had, after all, received quite a bit of teaching from Jesus. They had seen and experienced so much, and had quite a story to tell. So of course they were told to pass on to others all that Jesus had taught them. The Great Commandment: We are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. No human relationship is to have a higher priority

than our own personal relationship to God. This love must find application as we reach out in obedience to those about us.

The Great Commission: Great Commandment love is to be expressed not only in words but in action directed toward the people for whom Christ died. Jesus says we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. The best way to love our lost neighbours is to build a relationship that allows us to share with them the Good News of the Gospel. This will make us “*fishers of men.*” The best way to love our Christian neighbours is to help them become mature disciples of Jesus. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, this will ensure our Lord’s commendation, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

That brings up two very important questions: (1) If Jesus invites us into the Kingdom of God through the act of repentance, and then calls us to follow Him, how are we supposed to follow Him, considering He is now at the right hand of the Father? (Romans 8:34) (2) How can we possibly teach others to obey all that Jesus’ has commanded us if we haven’t directly sat under His teaching?

The answer to both questions, of course, is that we’ve been given the Bible. It contains the essential teachings of Jesus as well as those of the first disciples, so that we have what we need both to become disciples as well as to make other disciples.

### *What Is the Bible?*

We often think wrongly about the Bible. We think of it as a book, simply because most of us have a single volume with lots of pages



between two relatively fancy covers. However, the reality is, the Bible is actually a collection of 66 different books.

**39** books make up the Old Testament, which were all originally written sometime before roughly 400 B.C. These 39 books predominately tell the story of God's work through the nation that He chose as His people, Israel. Portions of these books contain history, portions contain law and regulations for worship, others contain poetry, and still others, words from prophets about what was happening in their day and what God would do in the future. The books are organized by the predominant literary genre, not necessarily by chronological order, so reading straight through from Genesis to Malachi without understanding the historical context of the books can get a bit confusing.

**27** additional books make up the New Testament, which begins with four different eye-witness accounts of the life of Jesus, called the gospels. They are followed by a historical book telling the story of the early church, the book of Acts, and then the majority of the rest of the New Testament is made up of letters written to churches, individuals, and other groupings of people. The New Testament ends with what is called an "apocalyptic vision" called "Revelation," written by the apostle John near the end of his life.

More important than the fact that the Bible is collection of 66 different books is that these books are God's Word to us about who He is, who we are, and how we are to engage the world around us.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- Where does Paul tell Timothy the Scripture comes from?
- What is the purpose for which the Scripture has been given?

If the Bible is “*breathed out*” by God, then one of the first questions many people have is why there are so many different versions of the Bible. Which one is right? Just like a letter sent to us from another country and culture, the Bible wasn’t originally written in English. Therefore, it must be translated from the original languages, which were primarily Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. Because of translation, there are minor differences between Translations - some take great pains to be exactly accurate with the text, but sacrifice readability for the modern reader, while others use a bit more freedom in translating from the original text in order to gain readability. Because English speaking readers are always reading a translation, it often works best when studying a passage to utilize at least two translations. I recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) as a very accurate yet highly readable translation, and the New Living Translation (NLT) as an easy to read version that is still quite faithful to the original language.

*Where do I start and what do I do?*

Once we understand that the Bible is the Word of God to us, given so that we would grow as disciples and ultimately, help others to

grow as disciples, most are anxious to read and learn. In fact, one of the marks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life, Who comes into our lives when we repent and enter into the Kingdom of God, is that we have a desire to read and understand the Word of God. But where should we begin?

There's no one way to approach the Scriptures, but here are a few tips to getting started reading the Scriptures for yourself:

- Read strategically. It's often best to start with one of the gospels, either Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, in order to understand more fully the life and teachings of Jesus. Following the reading plan in this book will take you through the entire gospel of Mark during this study.
- Read slowly. It's not a race! Don't solely read for quantity. The depths of the Word of God will continue to unfold to you all of your days on earth, so you won't be able to learn everything in a few months. Start by reading roughly a chapter at a time (more or less) and seeking to truly understand what that section of Scripture is teaching.
- Read prayerfully. The Word of God is alive, and God desires to speak to us through it. (Hebrews 4:12) Ask God to reveal Himself to you before you begin to read, and then listen for His voice as you read. He will give you insights about who He is and who you are as you read.
- Read obediently. We should never be reading the Word solely for information or material that we can teach

someone else. James tells us that we need to not simply hear the Word, but we need to do it as well! (*James 1:22-25*) As you read, allow God to show you ways that your life must change in order to be more conformed to His Truth.

The best advice for engaging the Word of God is simply to get started. As you read the Bible and ask others about it, you will quickly find that God speaks to you through His Word. When Jesus was being tempted in the desert (Matthew 4), His consistent response to temptation was to quote the Scripture. In one such response, He declared how foundational the Word is for our lives: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”* (Matthew 4:4)

Questions for Application:

- What’s the biggest barrier to you in reading the Word of God?
- Do you tend to approach the Word for information, for revelation, for inspiration, or for duty? Why is that?
- Read 1 Peter 2:1-3. Are there times that you approach the Word with negative motivations? Why is that?
- Do you long for the Word like a baby would long for “pure, spiritual milk?” (1 Peter 2:2) How would your life be different if you had that kind of hunger for the Word? Take some time to write a prayer asking God to increase your hunger for His Word and to reveal Himself to you as you study it.

# 5

Prayer: Our Conversations with God

Scripture to Read: Mark 2:18 – 3:6

Grace to Pray: *“Lord Jesus, may I learn to abide in You as You abide in me.”*

Day after day, the disciples followed Jesus. They saw Him do incredible things - powerful teaching, healings, miracles displaying power over the natural world and demonic forces, and many other things. It’s fascinating, however, that they never asked Him to teach them to do any of those things. Maybe they felt that they were uniquely within His power to do, so they didn’t think asking would be appropriate. Or, could it be, that of all that they noticed about the life of Jesus, none of these things were the most remarkable? They did make one request of Him to teach them, and it wasn’t about how to teach, heal, or perform miracles and exorcisms.

Read Luke 11:1.

- What did the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to do?
- What was the context of this request?

Jesus must have had a remarkable relationship with His Father, and it was observable to the disciples. They saw what He had, and wanted to have it as well!

Read Luke 11:2. How did Jesus teach the disciples to address God?

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray by addressing God as Father, He was teaching them and us something fundamental about

our relationship with God. Read 1 John 3:1. What does John tell us that we are?

As children of God, we have total access to God. We can come to Him at any time with anything at all, and He delights to hear from us. This reality is so wonderful that it's hard to even imagine! However, rather than us just coming before our Father babbling with excitement, Jesus gives His disciples a model by which we can pray. His desire is not for us to repeat His words like a parrot, but rather, to “mean” these ideas that He’s laid out before us.

For centuries, Christians have used the Lord’s Prayer as a model for prayer, either praying it phrase by phrase, or by summarizing the concepts in various forms. One such form that’s easy to remember is the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

*Adoration* - “Our Father, hallowed be Thy Name...”

Many times, in what is essentially a self-focused desire to have our own needs met, we rush into prayer bringing our requests before God. And we are certainly invited to bring our requests to Him! (Philippians 4:6) However, when we first recognize His greatness and worth, our requests, His sovereignty, and the reality of our situation come into focus. when we adore God for who He is, we are free to move around in His presence.

*Confession* - “forgive us our sins...”

We are given free access to our Father through Jesus; however, for many, we don't take advantage of that access because of our own sins. We know that we've fallen short, and we believe that by not coming before God in prayer, that sin will ultimately just fade away over time. However, that's a completely false notion! God, of course, knows everything about us - *including our sin* - and invites us into His presence anyway. Instead of hiding, He invites us to confess our sin before Him and receive His cleansing so that our relationship with Him is no longer marred by our sinful behaviours.

Read 1 John 1:9. What is promised to us if we confess our sin?

When we realize the deep blessing it is that we can confess our sins before a holy God and receive His cleansing, the next part of prayer will flow naturally...

*Thanksgiving* - “...as we forgive those who sin against us...”

Some see this phrase of the prayer as a conditional blessing: God will forgive us only if we forgive those around us. However, the Scriptures are clear that our forgiveness of those around us is really an act of thanksgiving - a marker that we've indeed been forgiven. Because we have been extended mercy, we can freely extend that same mercy to others.

Perhaps the clearest example of this principle is found in a story that Jesus told to Peter when he asked Him about forgiveness. Read



Matthew 18:23-35. While this story can easily be read as conditional forgiveness, Jesus was displaying to Peter the extent of the mercy that has been offered to us through His sacrifice. If we understand who we truly are before God, and we accept the forgiveness He offers, our thankful response is to offer that same forgiveness to those around us!

Our response of thanksgiving in prayer shouldn't simply be inward and meditative; as Jesus modelled, there should be action to our prayer. Because grace has been shown to us, we should engage the world differently. This is true thanksgiving.

*Supplication* - "Give us this day, our daily bread... Deliver us from evil..."

Finally, we are invited to make requests before God. This section is the final portion of our prayer not because it's the least important, but rather, because each of the other sections give context to what we are asking God. When we recognize His greatness and majesty, we will no longer pray that He would make our name great in the world around us. When we confess our sins before Him, we will no longer pray that others would get what they "deserve." When we are thankful for being the recipients of grace, we will no longer grumble and complain about how unfair our lives are. We are prepared to make requests before God in line with His nature and character... "*in Jesus' Name.*"

That said, we can ask Him for anything that is on our heart. We bring our needs before Him (life, breath, food for the day, etc.), and we also bring our desires before Him. ("*May Your Kingdom*

*come and Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*”) You may say, “What if my desires are not His Kingdom and will being done?” Fair question, and that’s the point of prayer! As you pray as a follower God will shape your heart and desires in accordance with His. You’ll find yourself desiring more and more what He desires! In the meantime, we are called to bring our hearts honestly before Him, ask for what’s on our hearts, and He will shape us.

Prayer is not intended to be a one-way monologue with the ceiling. Rather, it’s communicating with a Divine Person who loves us and longs to both hear from us and speak to us. Therefore, prayer shouldn’t simply consist of me talking to God, but also listening for Him to talk with me. God talks to us through the Bible, His Word, and we listen to Him by reading the Scriptures.

Questions for Application:

1. What’s the biggest barrier to you in prayer? How might you address that barrier?
2. Do you have time set aside to meet with God in prayer? If not, take some time to schedule at least 15 minutes a day for the next month to meet with Him. Consider times when you are awake and alert, can be alone and quiet, and times that you will be able to guard from interruptions and distractions. Write your plan for meeting with God below, and then do it!

# 6

## Community Relations

Scripture to Read: Mark 3:7-35

Grace to Pray: *“Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of other followers of You.”*

Up to this point, we’ve largely talked about following Jesus as something that we each do on our own. However, despite the individualistic leaning of our culture, the New Testament is quite clear that following Jesus is not for “Lone Rangers.” The Scriptural evidence for this is so overwhelming that it’s almost impossible to document, but consider a few:

There are dozens of “*one another*” commands throughout the New Testament, such as “*love one another*,” “*pray for one another*,” “*encourage one another*,” etc. (see Colossians 3:12-16, for example) How would we be able to fulfill Jesus’ call to teach people to “*observe all that I have commanded*” (Matthew 28:20) if there is no “other” with whom we can fulfil the “*one another*” commands?

There are references to both the global and the local church in the New Testament. However, out of 114 times “church” is mentioned in the New Testament, at least ninety are referring to a specific local gathering of followers of Jesus serving together on mission.

God has clearly called leaders in the local church to teach, care for, and lead the church. (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-8, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-7) Who would they be responsible to lead if we weren’t called into community?

The writer to the Hebrews describes the necessity of community within our spiritual journeys, teaching us that if we don't have others to exhort and encourage us, our hearts will ultimately be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (*Hebrews 3:13*) We need each other in order to pursue Jesus!

These are just a few of the many evidences that God has called us into fellowship with other believers. It's impossible to concisely state the need for other believers to walk this journey with us. However, there are four key relationships that each follower of Jesus should be intentionally engaging as a foundation for all other relationships within the body of Christ.

### *Membership in a Local Church*

As followers of Jesus, we are each a part of the global and universal church, which is made up of all followers of Jesus across all time and places. However, this must not be the extent to which we engage the church! It's vitally important for us to also be connected to a specific local church as well. There are many reasons for this, but here are three extremely significant ones:

- We are called to submit to the authority of specific leaders that God has placed over us in the church, and to pray for them. Submission to the authority and leadership of a "shepherd" (pastor) can only happen within the context of one specific local church. This is also necessary in order for us to submit to the church discipline, should it be necessary, that leaders are called to enact. (*Matthew 18:15-20*)

- We are shaped by the difficult aspects of community even more than the enjoyable aspects of community. Difficult people, situations, and personalities are all part of the ways that God shapes us into His likeness. When we are not connected to a specific local church, we will always move toward places that are more comfortable for us - however, more comfortable isn't always God's best for us. (James 1:2-4)
- We are called to observe the sacraments of communion and baptism as administered by local church leaders. Sacraments were clearly intended to be overseen by leaders in the church (*Acts 8:36, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34*) and celebrated among a community of disciples. It is impossible for this oversight apart from a connection to a local body. (See the next section for more details regarding these sacraments.)

### *Connection in a smaller community, or cell group*

It's very clear throughout the New Testament that God has given every disciple of Jesus at least one gift that we are to use for the building up of the body of Christ. For some, these gifts are a bit more "up front" in nature, whether through large group preaching and teaching, leading worship through singing or playing instruments, or even using the gifts of administration and hospitality to help those who attend a gathering feel welcome. However, even within the best case scenarios, only a small percentage of the total body of a local church are able to use the

gifts that they've been given in any given week during the corporate gatherings. Furthermore, the “*one another*” commands of Scripture referred to above must be worked out in levels to a certain degree. For instance, I can “*love*” or “*encourage*” someone I barely know at one level - however, both that person and I realize that we don't know one another that well, so the love and encouragement is tempered a bit with that knowledge. While it still has a level of worth and meaning with someone I'm not extremely connected with, how much more worth and meaning does that same love and encouragement have when it's given by someone who knows me deeply and intimately?

*Associated House Churches of Adhengo Boaz Ministries* has mentorship communities, and we call them **LIFE** groups, standing for **Living In Fellowship Everyday**, that are designed to be a place where every person can use their gifts, build deep relationships where we know those around us and are truly known by them, and can follow Jesus together. Like a commitment to a local church, connection with these groups shouldn't be taken lightly—the group will learn, over time, to truly rely on one another, and as above within the larger church setting, difficulties and disagreements can be used by God for our formation into the image of Jesus if we'll stay committed to that group. After a period of time, as disciples become more mature in their faith and go on to walk with others who are becoming disciples, these groups often multiply into a number of different groups, allowing them to remain small and therefore, maintain their intimacy, connection, and opportunity for each person's gifts to be used.

### *“Paul” and “Timothy” Discipleship Relationships*

The last two kinds of essential relationships can be lumped together under a single heading: discipleship relationships. One of the great blessings of our journey with Christ is that there are those who are both ahead of us and behind us in our journey. These brothers and sisters in Christ may or may not be chronologically older or younger than we are, but they are on the same path we are, and we have the privilege of walking with one another in our journeys.

The apostle Paul was extremely aware of this dynamic, which is why these discipleship relationships are often signified using the names “*Paul*” and “*Timothy*.” While these relationships can be seen throughout Paul’s letters, both relationships are clearly described in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Paul describes his relationship in terms of being a “*spiritual father*” to those behind him, and that Timothy, specifically, is his “*faithful child in the Lord*.” It is Timothy’s role, then, as one who has been specifically discipled by Paul, to model what it means to be a disciple of Jesus to those who are coming behind him.



Hopefully there's someone with whom you are already engaging this material. Maybe you are meeting after every few sections, or even after each section, and talking through all that you are reading and learning. If that's not happening, let me encourage you to find someone! Most spiritual fathers and mothers are thrilled to walk with those who desire to be disciples of Jesus - all you need to do is ask. As I look back at my life, those spiritual father relationships are some of the most cherished people in my life.

Wherever you are in your journey with Christ, you should begin to pray for someone that can be a "*Timothy*" for you, and in whom you will have the opportunity to intentionally invest.

#### Questions for Application:

1. Are you fully committed to a local church
2. Do you have a small community, or cell group, of people with whom you can share your gifts and your heart? If not, what would stop you from seeking out such a community?
3. Who is your "Paul?" Do you need to give that relationship greater intentionality in your life?
4. Who is your "Timothy?" Do you need to give that relationship greater intentionality in your life?



## Sacraments of the Church

Scripture to Read: Mark 4:1-34

Grace to Pray: *“Lord Jesus, thank you for your gift of new life in You.”*

From the very beginning of this study, we’ve looked at Jesus’ words to His followers immediately prior to His ascension, as recorded by Matthew:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

Seeking to establish a foundation on which we can build, we’ve discussed the idea of what it means to be a disciple, or follower, of Jesus. We’ve talked about a few of the ways that we can grow in our faith and maturity in Christ, so that we would be able to teach others to observe *“all that [Jesus] has commanded.”* The final piece of our foundation will deal with the two remaining sections of this great command: *“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* and *“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

### *Baptism*

Baptism is an outward symbol of the inward conversion to the Lordship of Jesus. Beliefs can emerge over time, particularly in a churched culture like ours.

## *Communion*

Baptism signifies our conversion, while communion, the other sacrament of the church, signifies the ongoing cleansing work of Jesus and His presence in our lives. The symbols, the bread and the cup, represent the body and the blood of Jesus. He made this reality extremely clear as He celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. The Passover was an ancient ceremony that told the story of God’s grace in freeing His people from slavery in Egypt. Here is how Luke records it in his gospel account:

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, *“Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”* And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, *“This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”* And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”* (Luke 22:17-20 ESV)

The church is called to celebrate communion regularly so that we can remind one another of the truth of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. Unlike many of the activities of the church, this remembrance is one reserved for those who are disciples of Jesus. Paul makes this quite clear. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

- What are we proclaiming when we take communion?
- How does Paul say that we, in taking communion would be “guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord” (vs. 27) and “eat and drink judgment on ourselves” (vs. 29)?

Our worthiness to receive the sacrifice of Jesus is based wholly on His sacrifice, not on anything that we have done. (Ephesians 2:8-9) Therefore, when he says that we mustn't eat without "*discerning the body*," Paul is reminding us that we come to the table not to get a meal or as a part of some religious ceremony, but as a reminder that Jesus has given His body for our sins. We then "*receive*" this sacrifice into our bodies, representing not just His cleansing work, but the incredible reality that Jesus Himself goes with us wherever we go.

### *Sacraments*

The Greek word "*mysterion*," where we get our English word mystery, was used for a variety of the practices of the early church, including baptism and communion. When the Latin language became the predominant language of the church, there was no word that corresponded to this Greek concept. Therefore, the theologians and preachers of the day began to use the Latin word "*sacramentum*" to approximate the Greek word "*mysterion*." It's from there we get the English word "sacraments."<sup>9</sup> While there are portions of the church that recognize additional practices as sacraments, the two universally agreed upon sacraments of the church across all Christian churches are communion and baptism.

This history of these words is important to recognize because, while we'd love to be able to finally define the meaning and process of these two rites, there is a necessary level of mystery involved in both of them. While we live in a scientifically oriented society that is focused on the natural, there is a decidedly supernatural component to faith in Jesus. Through our conversion, He

makes us a “*new creation*” (2 Corinthians 5:17), somehow transforming us in our essence.

The prophet Jeremiah describes that transformation this way: “*I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.*” (Jeremiah 31:33)

Baptism and communion both hold this same kind of supernatural mystery. They are symbols; outward representations of inward realities. And yet, the presence of God also accompanies their practice. The Spirit of God somehow meets us “in the midst” of our obedience to both practices, and spurs us on in our journey with Him. The extent to which this happens and the method He uses remains mysterious and the subject of much debate, but we are certain of this: Jesus has called all who follow Him to be baptized, and has told us to eat the bread and drink the cup of communion in remembrance of Him.

Questions for Application:

1. Have you been baptized as a believer in Jesus? If so, what do you remember about the experience? If not, why not?
2. Have you celebrated communion? What is the most meaningful aspect of the communion celebration to you? Why is that?
3. Take some time to review this last section. What things stood out to you? What are some key things that you need to remember? Write a prayer below asking Jesus to seal these truths to your heart and to establish a firm foundation for following Him.

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