



INTRODUCTION

I. WELCOME & OPENING DISCUSSION.

II. RESTATEMENT OF VALUES.

1. The gospel is the centre of all of our teaching.
2. We want to evaluate our church's health on the basis of whether the gospel is clear and applied in all ministry.
3. We will evaluate leaders on the basis of their ability to know, tell, and apply the gospel.

Housekeeping

- A. Don't worry about getting through the material, worry about the material getting through you.
- B. Please keep your video on if you have a connection and you are near your computer. Your face is important to others.

III. Gospel meditation.

This is an excerpt taken from Helmut Thielke's, 'The Waiting Father'.

Several years ago I once set my little son down in front of a large mirror. At first he did not recognize himself because he was still too young. But all of a sudden the expression on his little face changes as he began to recognize the similarity of the motions and he seemed to be saying, "That's me!" . . .

The same thing may happen to us when we hear this story . . . When we do this we make a remarkable discovery: in all these figures we suddenly find ourselves gazing at our own portrait. . . . The prodigal son--this is I, this is you! And the father--this is our Father in heaven who is waiting for us. But for now for a moment we must stand here before this mirror and get the image very clearly in our minds, so that we can say from the bottom of our hearts, "This is I."

Often, the old man gets on his nerves. Why can't a fellow be his own boss? Don't do this and don't do that. Always coming around with his everlasting "Thou shalt not"; always jerking the leash and whistling a fellow back. . . . There for the first time appeared that annoying limitation: so far and no farther. "And you call this freedom; always tripping over barriers and signboards; how is a person going to be able to develop and live his own life with the old man constantly stepping in with his house rules?" Just so have Adam and Eve and all their children and children's children sighed and groaned again and again.



Surely the father and son in the parable must have talked about this many times. The son would say, “Father, I want to be independent. You must give me my freedom. I can’t go on listening to this everlasting “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not.” And the Father replies: “My dear boy, do you really think you have no freedom? After all, you are the child in the house, you can come to me anytime you wish, and you can tell me anything and everything that troubles you. Many a person would be happy to have such a son’s privilege. Isn’t that freedom? Look, my whole kingdom belongs to you. I love you and I give you your daily bread, I forgive your trespasses with joy whenever you bring to me the burdens of your heart. You are quite free and subject to no one; you don’t have to account to anybody except me. And yet you complain that you are not free.”

And the son flares up and says, “No, father, to be honest with you, I don’t care a hoot about all that. I can’t stand this constant training. For me freedom means to be able to do what I want to do.” And the father quietly replies, “And for me freedom means that you should become what you ought to be. You should not, for example, become a servant of your desires, a slave to your ambition, to your need for recognition, your love of wealth, your blase intellectual boredom--oh, I could go on adding to the list. . . *That’s* why I forbid you so many things. Not to limit your freedom but just the opposite, in order that you may remain free of all this . . . Don’t you understand that it is love that is behind my bidding and forbidding?”

- Adapted from Helmut Thielke, *The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Part One*.

Questions:

- 1) In what ways have you found yourself thinking as the young brother in the parable? How have you, ‘tricked’ yourself into this kind of thought?
- 2) In what ways have you viewed the Father as a mean, ‘freedom stealing’ sort of Father?
- 3) What exactly do you need reminders of when it comes the the Father’s goodness?
- 4) What does your response tell you about what you actually believe about the Father’s goodness? How does the gospel then correct your response or fear and give you relief?

I. WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

A. INSTRUCTION.

We’ve stated in our values that we want the gospel to remain central in everything at Mission Hill Church. But how exactly do we keep it there? These next two sessions begin to answer that question. Jesus has not simply asked us to keep Him central in everything, but has actually given us an important resource to accomplish this; we call it **family**. The Word the Bible uses most: disciple. Matthew 28: 19,20 is a great starting point. ***‘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.’***

B. EXERCISE #1: GROUP DEFINITION.



A. *Group exercise.*

In this exercise, we want your groups to come up with a working definition of a disciple. Think of it like this: if someone was new to our church, and they heard the word ‘disciple’ in a conversation, and they asked you, ‘What do you mean by the word disciple?’, what would you tell them? When you have developed a definition, choose one person to be your spokesperson that is prepared to share your definition with the larger group. We want to hear from each other what we have discovered, and would like to try to put together a comprehensive definition. Together, we will compare our definitions of a disciple, find the similarities and attempt to produce a workable definition for us all to use. We’ve listed some Bible verses and passages that may give you some direction if you need it.

Possible texts to use:

- Luke 14:25-35
- Acts 1:7,8.
- Matthew 12:46-50.
- Luke 24:26,27.

BREAK!

II. HOW DOES A DISCIPLE MATURE?

A. EXERCISE #1

Please refer to the exercise handout.

B. INSTRUCTION.

In this exercise, we want to help you diagnose where you are in your discipleship path. Then, when you have evaluated where you are, you may consider some of the next steps you might take. To help with this, we should first understand what that path may look like. As a baseline evaluation, perhaps it may be helpful to think of the stages of human life and growth. What we want to focus on is the idea of being a consumer vs. being a provider, and how the life stages of human maturity are a progressive movement from consumer to provider. Many times, we do not have the expectation of growth given to us when we are given instruction.

EXAMPLE: I am going to wash your clothes for you, you watch. Then I’m going to wash clothes with you, and show you how to do it. Then I’m going to watch you wash your own clothes. Then I’m going to help you think about teaching your own children to wash their clothes. Then I’m going to have the expectation that you will not only wash your own clothes, but when your children come along, this process will be repeated.



Since as disciples we are: 1) Rational (learners), 2) Relational (family), and 3) Missional (sent), we need to understand where we are in the family. Let's continue to use that metaphor as a way of understanding the life phases of a family member.

i. Spiritually unborn.

ii. Spiritual Infant:

iii. Spiritual Child:

iv. Spiritual Young Adult/Adult.

iv. Spiritual Parent.

v. Spiritual Grandparent.

C. EXERCISE #2.

In truth, one of the reasons why we don't grow as disciples, is that we have not truthfully evaluated our own spiritual maturity, nor do we have clear expectations of how to move along the discipleship path towards spiritual maturity.

As you head off into your groups, spend some time initially *evaluating* yourself. Notice we didn't say *judge*. Judging implies an assessment for the purposes of judgement only, meaning that assessment is the only end. Evaluation attempts to draw conclusions from assessment. This means that evaluating someone is done with the purpose that once we understand the situation, we want to do something with it. You are not being called to make decisions on someone's spiritual journey, just for the sake of judgement, but rather, in an attempt to intentionally help them continue moving on the discipleship path. These evaluations are not scientific either, but are best done with a prayerful attitude that is committed to serving. You may get something wrong, but even through the process of evaluation will be helpful.



1. Evaluate your own spiritual maturity. Use these questions as a guide if they are helpful.

- Where would you evaluate yourself on this path? What life phase do you tend to find yourself most in? Why?
- What are the things that you may feel you need to do to continue to move along that path? What is preventing you from doing them?
- Write down a list of potential steps for yourself. Make them as specific and realistic as possible. Example: Instead of Bible reading, say, 'Start a Bible reading plan, or learn to study my Bible', or , 'Teach someone how to read their Bible", or 'Teach a Bible study'. All of these include the Bible, but they are different in that they could be categorized in different maturity phases of the Bible. Instead of saying, 'Become more active in my church', write down, 'involvement in _____ ministry in _____ capacity. If you have no idea of the gifts you have been given, simply write, 'find out where I'm truly gifted'.

B. Discuss your findings with your group at your discretion. This is not to embarrass anyone (remember, we are family!), but to allow everyone to experience the welcome accountability that comes with being part of a healthy family. More often than not, you'll find that this experience brings you closer together because you'll realize that you are not alone in your maturity--there are others who will be at the same point.

C. Evaluate the spiritual maturity of the people on your Adullam homework sheet.

Hint: This is an uncomfortable exercise for many, because it involves potential judgements on people who you are close to. This isn't a scientific exercise, and the reality is, you could be very wrong about your evaluation. The point isn't to be right or wrong, but to encourage you to think about what you might do to consider what you could do to continue the trajectory of discipleship growth.

D. Discuss your findings with the group at your discretion.



V. CONCLUSION.

In your groups, discuss the biggest take away from session 1? Why? If you're comfortable, be prepared to share with the large group.

