



The Essentials of Disciple-Making

Session Four: Living a Gospel Lifestyle

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

What is the gospel? In Greek, *evangelion*, or *euangelizō*, appears more than 120 times in the New Testament, and is translated “gospel,” or more often “good news.” In New Testament times, the preaching of good news often accompanied healings and miracles.

Jesus described His ministry in this way: “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the **good news**” (Matthew 11:5).

When we embrace a gospel lifestyle, we love God and others the way Jesus does. Living a “good news” life isn’t a one-time event at our salvation, nor is it a single mission trip experience. Rather, as we walk in step with God daily, we are drawn to see people the way God sees them and love people the way Christ does.

Great Commission believers are Great Commandment believers, walking with God and loving others for a lifetime.

TODAY’S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 12:1-2

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus said the greatest command is to love God and love others. Today, we’ll examine how these two commands complement and depend on one another and how we can grow in keeping God’s commands throughout our lives.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What would you say is your most important role in life? How do your lifestyle, priorities, expenses, and conversations either support or challenge that claim?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Matthew 22:34-38 Jesus narrowed the whole law down to two commands—loving God and loving others. True discipleship means walking with God for a lifetime. We will never outgrow our need for discipleship. As we walk in step with God, we are transformed through the Holy Spirit into the people Christ has called us to be.

Matthew 22:39-40 We cannot love God and hate people. Jesus said all the law hangs on the commands to love God and love others. Loving people means telling them about Jesus, and it also means treating them with kindness and integrity. Just like we’ll never outgrow discipleship, we’ll never outgrow or retire from Jesus’s command to love others as we love ourselves.

Romans 12:1-2 True discipleship is more than a one-time event when we come to Christ. Gospel growth happens when we offer our lives to God as living sacrifices, renewing our minds through the careful study of God and His Word, and being transformed by the daily work of the Holy Spirit.



START HERE

What is at the heart of discipleship? How do we follow God with our lives? When the religious leaders of the day posed this question to Jesus, He answered by quoting two Old Testament commands—love God and love others. He said all 613 commands in the Torah point to these two. As we talk about living a gospel lifestyle for a lifetime, we will look at how we are called to live out these commands as a model for walking with God and loving others throughout our entire lives.

DISCUSS

Christians are called to grow through each season of our lives. How might we measure spiritual growth to determine if our faith is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. True discipleship means gospel growth for a lifetime.

Romans 12:1-2: *Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*

Unpacking Romans 12:1-2

There's something moving about watching the senior football players walk off the field from their last high school game. Often these big, sweaty teenagers, who were toughing it out on the field a few minutes before, are shedding tears and smearing their eye black as they walk away from a sport that some of them will never play competitively again. This is one example of the "end of an era" a person might experience in life. Other examples might include retirement from a long-held job or moving across the country and away from one's hometown. People often say, "all good things must come to an end." Yet, for followers of Christ, this is not the case.

From the moment we receive Christ until we meet Him in heaven, we have a calling from which we will never retire or "hang up our cleats." The gospel message we believe is not the end of our journey; it is the beginning. As we join God in His work, loving Him, loving others, and joining His work in the world, we begin to live out the gospel not as an event, but as a lifestyle.

In Romans 1–11, Paul outlined the problem of sin, taught on salvation by faith over works, and praised God's sovereign choice to bring salvation to non-Jews. In chapter 12, he turned his focus to righteous living as a response to new life in Christ.

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God": As a starting place, it is important to remember we do not come to Christ in our own strength or power (Ephesians 2:8-



9). We come to Christ by grace through faith. Through Christ, God has spared us the punishment our sins deserve (Psalm 103:10). Titus 3:5 reminds us, “he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy.” Paul used the phrase “in view of God’s mercies” to segue into the latter portion of the book of Romans. He wanted the readers to remember their good standing with God and righteousness were not outcomes of their hard work and dedication but rather gifts of a loving and merciful God.

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God”: A living sacrifice would have been a mind-bending thought for ancient Jews or Greeks. By nature, a sacrifice died and was consumed by fire as an offering to God. The exchange of life for life was the very nature of the sacrificial system. Since “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), the sacrificed animal paid the price for sin. Even the priest who made the sacrifice had to present his body in a certain way, ritualistically clean and purified, to be worthy of making the offering (Exodus 29). In Romans 12:1, however, Paul told these new Christians to present themselves to God as a “living sacrifice.” We are to continually offer ourselves to God in ongoing sacrifice of our ambitions, goals, and selfish desires placed on the altar of God’s mercy and love. When we surrender our lives and plans to God, sparing nothing, this manner of holy living pleases God.

“This is your true worship”: The essence of true worship is crucial to the church as it is how we approach and exalt God daily. This idea has always been heavily debated. In the late twentieth century, the debate centered around music styles and which instruments in worship glorified God. In the last twenty years, the debate has included gender roles in the church, which translations to use, and even the use of technology in services. Since 2020, the digital revolution in streaming services has people questioning if worship must happen with others in a sanctuary, or if it can happen alone while watching on TV from my home or dormitory. These debates about how the church functions (ecclesiology) are important discussions for God’s people but miss the point Paul is making in Romans 12:1. He said “true” worship is about the heart of the worshiper, not the environment in which they worship. True worship is when followers of Jesus continually submit their lives to God’s control. As David Platt says, “Worship is more than what happens when we gather together with the church, it is a daily presenting of ourselves in submission before God.”¹ In this way, we live out the gospel as we surrender our lives to Christ’s control every day. Gospel growth is a daily process and not defined by a moment.

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”: It takes much less effort to be conformed to this present age than to be conformed into the image of Christ. Beauty and fashion standards, rampant consumerism, and a lifestyle of self-indulgence paint a false idea of human thriving that leaves people always chasing more, hoping one day to be “conformed” into the person they think they should be. Not so for God’s people. We are called not to conform but to be transformed in our thoughts and actions. Conformation to the world is based on the elusive promise that material possessions can change you from the outside in. True transformation happens when we submit ourselves to God’s Spirit, who does the work of changing us from the inside out. Furthermore, this transformation takes place as we



continually renew our minds through the study of Scripture, prayer, worship, service, and spending time with God's people. As we pursue Christ, He transforms us.

“So that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” This renewing of our minds is not merely an academic exercise. As we gain the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), we can better discern God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. Not only that, but we will also desire to join with Christ in carrying out His will “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). We live in a noisy world, and listening to God in the chaos of the everyday can seem impossible. However, God's Word encourages us that if we put our minds to knowing and following Christ daily, He will make His will known to us.

Gospel growth happens when we offer our lives to God as living sacrifices, renewing our minds through the careful study of God and His Word and being transformed by the Holy Spirit as God's set-apart community. Unlike the high school football players, who, after graduation, don't get to play the game anymore, the life of a follower of Jesus isn't destined for spiritual retirement. We are called to pursue Christ with humility and joy all the days of our lives.

DISCUSS

- *Can you think of a “walking off the field” moment that was particularly poignant in your life (moving away, kids leaving home, retirement, etc.)? How is following Christ different?*
- *What does the term “living sacrifice” mean to you? What parts of your life are harder than others to place on God's altar?*
- *How do we go about “renewing our minds” so we can discern God's will? What spiritual practice has helped you in this area?*

2. True discipleship means walking with God for a lifetime.

Matthew 22:34-38: *When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: “Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.** This is the greatest and most important command.”*

Unpacking Matthew 22:34-40

Whether in high school, college, or professional athletics, one of the tasks of participating on a team is learning the playbook. Football players must memorize an extensive list of plays and remember the complicated signals from the coaches who are calling them. Without a playbook, the team would run in circles, unsure what to do next.

For believers in Jesus Christ, the Bible is our play book. When we study it extensively, we come to know God's plan for our lives, understand His signals and commands, and can better discern how to follow Him in our daily lives. The Old Testament contains 613 laws that the Jewish



people were obligated to obey. These laws, called the *mitzvot*, contained moral laws, civil laws, and ceremonial laws. By the intertestamental period (from the time of Malachi in roughly 420 BCE to early in the first century), the Jewish rabbis added an extensive list of additional laws not found in Scripture to form a “hedge of protection” around God’s laws. They wanted to prevent breaking covenant with Him. These rabbinic laws, also called the *halakha* or *mitzvot d'rabbanan*, extended God’s law in some practical, but sometimes legalistic ways, but were considered “law” in the same way as the 613 laws of the *mitzvot*. These rules include some practical considerations, like washing your hands before you eat bread or lighting candles to welcome the sabbath, but they also included some rules to prevent breaking a law. An example might be not holding a tool or pencil on the sabbath, because it might lead to one inadvertently working.

This was the context of the question posed by the religious leaders to Jesus, “Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?” If Jesus named one of the Ten Commandments over the others, He could be accused of picking and choosing. If He cited a law from the *mitzvot*, they might say He did not respect the rabbinic tradition. If He chose a law from the *halakha*, they could accuse Him of disrespecting the Torah. Instead, Jesus masterfully pointed toward two Old Testament laws upon which He said all the other laws depend (some translations say “hang”).

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . Love your neighbor as yourself.” Loving God and loving others are mutually connected. As the Expositor’s Bible Commentary points out, “the two commandments stand together. The first without the second is intrinsically impossible (cf. 1Jn 4:20), and the second cannot stand without the first—even theoretically—because disciplined altruism is not love. True love demands abandonment of self to God, and God alone is the adequate incentive for such abandonment.”²

True discipleship is about loving God, and the overflow of that love relationship is authentic love and care for others. There is a joke about an old woman complaining to her husband of many years, “You never say ‘I love you’ anymore.” The man replies, “Well, I said it at our wedding. If anything changes, I’ll let you know!” Imagine if we were to treat our relationship with God the same way. It is not enough to respond to Him in love when we’re saved and never draw near to Him again. As Jesus reminds us in the text, we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. The Jewish listeners of the day would not have heard this commandment as we might hear a three-point message today. To them, the “heart, soul, and mind” embodied the whole person. In other words, we are to love God with all that we are for all our lives.

God does not need anything we might offer Him—riches, power, or sacrifices. What He desires is our love and devotion. As the Old Testament prophet Hosea wrote, “For I desire faithful love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). Faithful love goes the distance. If we want to know what real love looks like, we have only to look to the cross. God loved us so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins, so we might be reconciled to Him (John 3:16). This is not a love we can earn. God did not wait on us to become holy to love us. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:



While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NIV). God demonstrated His love at the cross, and we demonstrate our love when we walk faithfully with Him.

Psalms 40:6-8 says, “You do not delight in sacrifice and offering; you open my ears to listen. You do not ask for a whole burnt offering or a sin offering. Then I said, ‘See, I have come; in the scroll it is written about me. I delight to do your will, my God, and your instruction is deep within me.’” When we long to know God, and we delight in obeying Him, our love for Him grows. As John Piper famously said, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”³ Everything else in life will fade away; the return for many of life’s investments is not worth the cost. Loving God and walking with Him daily is not only part of Christ’s highest command but also the source of our highest joy.

This begs the question, “Can we really love God and continue to disobey Him?” Scripture tells us we cannot. In Luke 6:46 Jesus says, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say?” If we told people we loved them but never listened when they spoke, didn’t acknowledge them to our friends and family, and refused to take any of their words to heart, it would be appropriate for them to question our love. In the same way, part of loving God is obeying Him. In John 14:15 Jesus told the disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commands.”

But who can fully obey God’s commands? We can’t do it in our strength. Jesus went on to say, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn’t see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). The Holy Spirit enables us to love God and follow His commands. When we abide in Him, we both receive His love and reciprocate love.

Today, we are not bound by the 613 laws of the *mitzvot* or the additional rabbinic laws of the *halakha*. Jesus did what we could never do: He fulfilled the law on our behalf. He explained, “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished” (Matthew 5:17-18). Jesus’s sacrifice fulfilled the sacrificial laws. His teachings expanded and deepened our understanding of moral law, and as our High King of heaven, He sits enthroned forever, making us citizens of heaven, where there will be no need for earthly ceremonial laws. He bought our citizenship with love. And now, at its heart, only the two greatest laws remain—love God and love others.

DISCUSS

- *God’s Word is meant to guide us but is not merely a book of rules. How can thinking of Scripture in terms of “rules” get us off course?*
- *What has changed for us since Jesus has fulfilled the law on our behalf? Why is it important to recognize this does not mean God calls for lowered obedience from His people?*



- *In our relationship with God, why are love and obedience so closely intertwined?*

3. True discipleship means loving others for a lifetime.

Matthew 22:39-40: *The second is like it: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.*

Unpacking Matthew 22:39-40

Imagine trying to play a team sport alone. You could love the game, receive excellent coaching, and memorize the playbook, but at the end of the day, you need a team. In the same way, Jesus finished answering the religious leader's question by saying that loving others is the second most important command. Like trying to play football or baseball without a team, trying to love God without loving others falls far short of the life Christ has for us.

"Love your neighbor as yourself" was not a new command. In Leviticus 19:9-18, Moses instructed the Israelites on how God commanded them to relate to one another. He told them to leave margin in their fields and vineyards for the poor and sojourner to harvest. (This law is why Ruth was able to gather and glean in Boaz's field in Ruth 2.) God instructed them not to steal, lie, or take His name in vain. He spoke out against oppressing the poor and taking advantage of hurting people. He commanded them to govern themselves with integrity in their courts and legal system. He spoke out against slander. He commanded them to pursue peace, reject hatred, and forgive others. Finally, He concluded this passage with the words Jesus referenced. Leviticus 19:18 says, "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." If these commands sound familiar, they reflect the Ten Commandments God gave Moses in Exodus 20. The heart of the Ten Commandments is the heart of Jesus in the Greatest Commandment—love God and love others.

Notice that after each of God's commands in Leviticus 19:9-18, He said, "I am the Lord." We are called to love others in response to God's authority in our lives. When we come to Christ, we no longer choose whether we will love others. Authentic love flows from Christ's love. That's why in 1 John 4:19 it says, "We love because he first loved us." We do not love because we are naturally good, loving people. We love because God loved us first. However, if we do not love others, Scripture says we do not love God. John went on to say in verse 20, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." Loving others is the fruit of living in Christ's love.

The ultimate expression of love toward our neighbors is pointing them to Jesus. In 1 John 4:9-10, John wrote, "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." John's words



here echo what he wrote in John 3:16: “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

If we really aim to love others, it begins with loving them enough to share Jesus with them. But that is only the beginning: We also love others by continuing with them in a pattern of discipleship. We need to continue to walk alongside others so that they might learn to follow Jesus in daily life, and we need others to do the same for us. This means our work is never done. Discipleship is not a box we check off a list but a way we live every day. When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He called them to give up the rest of their lives, not just one moment or even a prolonged season.

As we live together in this way, we grow as followers of Christ and give evidence of the genuine nature of our faith. First John 3:18 says, “Let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.” Our Great Commandment life is what gives us the credibility for Great Commission living. When we love others authentically, admit our faults, treat people with respect, and honor God with our choices, we gain the credibility to share our faith with them and continue to walk with them as we seek to growth in Christ together.

Loving others for a lifetime is the overflow of walking with God for a lifetime. The more we love God, the more we want to love others. The more we exhaust our reserves in loving and serving others, the more we are drawn to Christ to fill us anew. Great Commission believers are Great Commandment believers on a journey with God and others for a lifetime.

DISCUSS

- *How would seeking to love God but not loving others miss an essential component of the Christian life? Conversely, how would seeking to love others without spending time drawing near God miss the mark, too? Which way are you more prone?*
- *Why can you not be a Great Commission Christian without being a Great Commandment Christian?*
- *Why does loving others require more than just evangelism? How can you love others through relationships of ongoing discipleship?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

Followers of Christ live in the “already” and the “not yet.” Already we have been justified (forgiven) by Christ, we are in the process of being sanctified (made holy) in Christ, and we are not yet glorified (living in eternity) with Christ. This space in between meeting Jesus and being with Jesus is where discipleship happens. We will never outgrow the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. We are called to walk with God and love others for a lifetime.

However, there is a starting point for each person. Have you started life with Christ? It begins when we believe by faith that Jesus is God’s Son, that He loved us and gave His perfect life on



the cross for our sin, and on the third day rose again. When we acknowledge our sin and confess our need for Christ and His forgiveness, new life begins. If you've never trusted Jesus, talk to a leader, pastor, or mentor about it today. The invitation to walk with God and love others for a lifetime is for you, too.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God." —Romans 12:1-2

- How does God's mercy draw us into authentic worship?
- Why do we need our minds renewed, and how do we seek this change?
- Who do you need to invite into an intentional discipleship relationship? What first steps will you take?

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- Where is living out your faith challenging right now? What needs to shift in you this week to move in the direction God calls you?

APPLY

Second Corinthians 5:14 says, "the love of Christ compels us." How are you compelled to love God or love others this week? How can you ask another believer for support as you pursue that commitment?

REFERENCES

¹ David Platt, "A Living Sacrifice (Romans 12:1)," Pray the Word, Radical, April 5, 2018, <https://radical.net/podcasts/pray-the-word/a-living-sacrifice-romans-121/>.

² Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, eds. Richard P. Polcyn and Verlyn D. Verbrugge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

³ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2011), 10.