

Maranatha Bible Church 2020
Equipping Hour: Proactive Discipleship
Week 1: What is Proactive Discipleship¹

Purpose of the Class

The overall goal of this six-week class is to equip the everyday churchgoer to be able to practice discipleship and to know the importance of discipleship in the life of a healthy church. I am also going to show the difference between program driven discipleship and Biblical discipleship; how both are needed but one is fruitful. We are going to take the first three weeks and underscore the theological significance of discipleship and then three weeks looking at the practical outworking of our theology.

Schedule of Classes:

Theological:

Week 1: What is proactive discipleship?

Week 2: Why should we disciple?

Week 3: What are some common excuses and barriers to discipleship?

Practical:

Week 4: Discipling the hurting.

Week 5: Discipleship and Accountability

Week 6: Dangers and Joys of discipleship

Introduction .

When someone says *discipleship*, what comes to mind? A strict, multi-week study through a book or a Bible study through one of the books of the Bible? Maybe it conjures up ideas of meeting one on one at a predetermined time. These things *are* discipleship, but I believe there is more that we should be doing. Whatever your view of discipleship is, I hope to help frame it in a more Biblical way and pattern.

Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19** “Go therefore and ***make disciples*** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The only actual command in these verses is *make disciples*,

¹ This six week study is based upon Daron Roberts work *Proactive Discipleship: A Guide Teaching People How To Think Biblically*

this is the imperative verb that Jesus uses to stress the importance of what He was saying. The baptizing and teaching are participles which support the main idea of going and making disciples. They represent the *how* one is to make disciples.

Proactive Discipleship

This is where we come to the idea of *proactive discipleship*. As is pointed out², there are two ways in which we commonly think of discipleship: **reactive** and **proactive**. Most likely you have been involved in reactive discipleship if you have been in church for any length of time. While helpful, reactive discipleship is based upon a need more than establishing a way of life. For example, reactive discipleship gives good counsel for the problem at hand. It also waits for opportunities to arise and problems to come. Those who practice reactive discipleship do so with love and care, they pray for the person and usually dedicate their time together to a limited scope within the issue at hand.

To contrast proactive with reactive discipleship, proactive discipleship does all that reactive does but then *proactively* moves into people to invest into their life. They desire to strive alongside someone, giving their own life as an example to be followed. Let's look at **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12** "For you yourselves know, brethren, *that our coming to you* was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, *we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God* amid much opposition. For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. *For we never came with flattering speech*, as you know, *nor with a pretext for greed*-- God is witness--*nor did we seek glory from men*, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. But *we proved to be gentle among you*, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. *Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased* to impart to you *not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us*. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, *how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers*; just as you know how *we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*"

² *Proactive Discipleship*, p. 2

Let's take this apart to get a feel for what Paul and his companions did in order to make sure the believers at Thessalonica were walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.

1. They **went** to the people at Thessalonica. This is proactive discipleship.
2. They **were bold**, not in their own talents but in the gospel of God.
3. They did not try and sound smart or like the culture. They **did not try and impress** the people.
4. They **proved themselves** among the people they were trying to reach.
5. They **loved them**, so much so that they not only gave them the gospel but also their very lives. The people there had become so dear to Paul and his companions.
6. Paul and his companions **behaved** in such a way that they could then use their own behavior as an example as how to walk pleasing to the Lord.
7. They exhorted, encouraged and implored the people, **in a loving way**.
 - a. They had a specific purpose; to get the lives of the people in line with what the Lord desires.
8. This is proactive discipleship from beginning (gospel message for salvation) to the end (the word of God for sanctification).
9. Read what Paul says in **2 Timothy 3:14-17** “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
 - a. What do we see about the use and power of the Scriptures?
 - i. Verses 14-15 ...*the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith...*
 - ii. Verses 16-17 ...*all scripture is inspired...so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*
 - iii. When we go outside the Scriptures for salvation or sanctification we are now operating under our own power at best and demonic power at worst.

Looking at **Romans 15:14** “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and **able also to admonish one another.**”

1. Notice here Paul uses the word **νουθετέω** (to put in mind, to caution or reprove gently:—admonish, warn). This is proactive discipleship. This is not a passive verb, but one that is already assuming an action from those whom Paul is writing...**namely the church.**

- a. Technically, this is an infinitive verb that Paul uses and it is there to complete the thought of what Christians in the church are able to do *because* they are full of goodness and filled with all knowledge.
2. The word **νουθετέω** is not used much in the NT.
 - a. Acts 20:31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease **to admonish** each one with tears.”
 - b. Romans 15:14 “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also **to admonish** one another.”
 - c. 1 Corinthians 4:14 “I do not write these things to shame you, but **to admonish** you as my beloved children.”
 - d. Colossians 1:28 “We proclaim Him, **admonishing** every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”
 - e. Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and **admonishing** one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
 - f. 1 Thess. 5:12 “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and **give you instruction.**”
 - g. 1 Thess. 5:14 “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”
 - h. 2 Thess. 3:15 “Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”
 3. I am showing you these so that you will know that Paul not only was proactive in his discipleship but *he also fully expected those in the church to be as well.*
 - a. We are expected to pursue and invest in others in the church. “You don’t selfishly hang back when you see opportunities to be spent for another soul.”³

*Now that we can clearly see what is expected from us in Scripture, lets look at some of the very practical steps that we can make in order to invest in people at a much more complete level⁴. My goal is to really bring to bear on us what Paul did in Thessalonica with the church.

³ Ibid p. 2

⁴ Parts of this list taken from p. 2

1. Study their biography in depth (2:8 *they became dear to the apostles*)
 - a. Gathering information is critical and usually accomplished over informal times of getting together. This should not be clinical but rather a natural outworking of you genuinely caring for the soul of another believer.
 - b. Someone cannot become dear to you if you only have a cursory understanding of who they are.
2. Study their present habits (2:14 *they became imitators of the churches of God...they were not before*)
 - a. Learn how they view the Bible, what reading they do, who do they hang out with, how is their relationship with their family.
 - b. Find out what priorities they have in their life.
3. With regards to their habits, you may need to both warn and encourage them in their habits (2:11 *the apostles exhorted, encouraged and implored the church*)
 - a. Proactive discipleship is not just about consoling someone, but it is actively bringing the Word of God to bear down on the hearts and minds of people.
 - b. Sometimes the Word will be a soothing balm for a hurting heart and other times it will be a convicting hammer to break down sin. You have to be able to use it both ways.
4. As you are interacting and talking with them, consider where God, in His Word, says that He desires to take them (2:12 *the apostles took the Word there so that the church would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls them*).
 - a. This may seem to be complicated but it is actually quite simple...***the Lord desires us to be sanctified in all that we think, do and say.***
 - i. **1 Thessalonians 4:3 “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;”**
 - ii. **1 Thessalonians 4:7 “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”**
 - b. You may need to encourage them to strive and strain for holiness in an area in their life.
 - c. The Bible promises blessings and peace with God when we adhere to His standards for this life.
 - i. Bring this out in your discipleship with one another. You should never tell the person to do something or act in a certain way because you or anyone else desires it.
 - ii. For example, husbands and wives should not act in a certain way towards their spouse because he/she desires it.
 1. What happens when desires change? What happens when you do not meet the needs of your spouse?

- iii. We are commanded to act in a certain way towards our spouse because of Christ, not because they demand it. Our spouse will be satisfied when we treat them as Christ has commanded them to be treated.
5. Jude 20-23 *“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.”*
- a. We must be willing to step into the waves and the fire to help people around us⁵.
 - b. As Spurgeon said, to spiritually influence other souls, “You will have to go through mental torment and soul distress. You must go into the fire if you are going to pull others out of it, and you will have to dive into the floods if you are going to draw others out of the water. You cannot work a fire escape without feeling the scorch of the conflagration, nor man a lifeboat without being covered with the waves.”
 - c. Look at what Jude says we are supposed to be doing with one another:
 - i. He pursues them when they wander.
 - ii. He lifts them up when they fall.
 - iii. He counsels them based on the need of the season (*1 Thess. 5:14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*).
 - iv. He is willing to put the relationship on the line to love them with truth (*Prov. 27:6 “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”*).
6. What stands in the way of a healthy and robust proactive discipleship in a church body?⁶
- a. **Selfish in that they self-protect:**
 - i. They don’t engage others so that won’t have to be vulnerable themselves.
 - ii. If they keep their relationships with others at the surface level, they won’t be asked questions that could expose them. This is the classic case of un-mortified fear of man (Prov. 29:25) or of a selfish desire that they don’t want to give up (Prov. 18:1). Selfish people are not good question askers.
 - b. **Selfish in that they are self-absorbed:**
 - i. They think so much about themselves that they don’t care to learn about others.
 - ii. People whose minds are occupied with themselves all the time are not going to have room left in their thoughts for the needs of others.

⁵ *Proactive Discipleship*, p. 3

⁶ *Ibid* pp. 3-4

- iii. Life is about them. They happily enjoy when others engage them, but they can't muster up enough humility to proactively pursue someone else. Nor do they ask questions they don't care about—namely, other people's needs.

c. **Selfish in that they have self-pity:**

- i. This person is self-wallowing, and because they are too busy feeling sorry for themselves and their weaknesses, they never arise in faith to learn how they can overcome their sins and help others overcome the same besetting sins (Ps. 51:13, 2 Cor. 10:3–10).
 - ii. This person lives in a state of shallow repentance and does not look to Jesus with eyes of faith in order to help others (Heb. 12:1–3).
- d. These three types of people all have one thing in common, they are only thinking of themselves. As believers, we are called to look out for others.

- i. As Paul says in **Philippians 2:3-4** “**Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**”

- ii. I want to point out what this does and does not mean. This does not mean that we let ourselves go and never do anything that is beneficial for ourselves.
 - iii. Notice what Paul says, *do not merely (only) look out for your own personal interests.* You are more than welcome to have your own personal interests, but if you put those over and above others, then you are being selfish.
 - iv. What this does mean is that the church should be taking care of each other. If we have someone in need and you can help them in that need, put your own interests aside and help them out.
- e. Overall, it is a matter of stewardship. How are we using the resources (time, money, things, etc.) that God has entrusted to us.

7. Two types of people who practice proactive discipleship.

- a. **1 Corinthians 3:6-10** “**I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.**”
- b. Notice all that is going on here with regards to discipleship.
 - i. Paul planted
 - ii. Apollos watered

- iii. God is the one who ultimately gives the growth in someone
- iv. It is not about the one planting or watering
 - 1. Each person, who is faithful to their work, gets rewards from God. It has nothing to do with the result but with the process.
 - 2. God is solely responsible for the fruit and we are solely responsible for using the means which God has given us.
- v. I love this phrase that Paul uses...*we are God's fellow workers*...
 - 1. The New Testament writers use this word *συνεργός* (συν = together, εργός = work) 13 times in his writings. 12 of them are about others who are co-laboring for the gospel.
 - 2. This word, *συνεργός*, is where we get our word *synergy* from. God is literally working with those who are planting and watering.
 - 3. You and I have the blessing of co-laboring with God. Just as you labor alongside one another in the flesh here at church, God is there with you as well.
- vi. Here is the encouragement that we should take from knowing this.
 - 1. God empowers us to do His work...God only commands that we do the work with His means...God never demands results, because those are up to Him. Finally, He is with us, through thick and thin, as we reach out to do labor with Him.

8. **Why do we do all of this?** (this will be answered more next week, looking at *Colossians 1:28-29*)
- a. Why should we put our own life on hold or even on the back burner for others? In other words, what should our goal be as we put ourselves out there with others?
 - b. Listen to what Paul says here in *Colossians 1:28-29* “**We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, *so that* we may present every man complete in Christ. For *this purpose* also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.**”
 - i. Our goal is not to see clones of ourselves but to see people become complete in Christ.
 - c. It is not merely to help people self-indict, or cause unnecessary introspection for the sake of self-loathing, but to teach them to identify evil cravings and bad theology, confess and forsake sin, and apply the Word to their inner life in the moment they are most tempted—with the goal of pursuing Christlikeness⁷.
 - d. We can't help people become like Christ until they know how to identify what hinders them from honoring their King.

⁷ Ibid p. 5