

## Being Radically Word-Centered when Making Disciples

*How do we let the Bible speak into all of life? We want to help people be principle driven and not rule driven so that Scripture shapes all of their decisions and passions. We want God's Word to set the priorities for every aspect of our lives. So there is a massive necessity for biblical wisdom, since worldly wisdom appears wise but isn't dependent on God and His Word. We all have blind spots where we let the world or our experience define what is good and right unknowingly, so we need to be saturated in the Word.*

### I. The Sufficiency of Scripture

All Scripture is useful for its purpose of shaping and molding us. That means that the Bible speaks to every facet of life! The Word is what teaches, exposes, corrects, and trains us in righteousness. It makes us wise for salvation. It restores us so that we are sufficient and proficient for every good work. In other words, if there is anything good and worth doing in this life, Scripture is what shapes us to do it.

#### *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.*

Since Scripture is sufficient, we should be ready to preach it all the time! The Word is what does the work. But we are called to always do so with great patience and explanation. This shows that the way the Word changes people is through them understanding it. In light of our stubbornness and blind spots, we all need the Word carefully explained, patiently to us, until we fully grasp its meaning **and** application to us.

#### *2 Timothy 4:1-5*

*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

It's clear in these verses that the Word exposes and corrects us and shows us how to live and do good with our lives. We can never allow the subtle lie to take hold that relegates Scripture to being true but irrelevant. The Word is absolutely vital for doing what we were created to do, which is good works that glorify God.

Table Discussion: What will happen if we don't think Scripture is sufficient for the questions and problems we have? What will we turn to instead of God's Word?

## II. Made to rule

We have taught on this point at length in previous courses, so I won't belabor the point, but God didn't just make us to merely follow rules. Rather, He made us to rule for Him and under Him as His ambassadors. He designed us in such a way that to properly obey Him, we have to imbibe and internalize His values and actually learn to love what He loves to properly represent Him (Gen. 1:26). He wants us to study Him, to know Him, and become like Him, so that wherever we are, we can represent His values, will, and purpose, by making decisions that He would want that reflect Him. This means that all of Scripture is immensely valuable, not merely as a rule book, but as a way to know God, His purposes, plan, and values. This is what we were made for.

## III. Biblical decision making priorities

At the risk of oversimplifying, I want to give you a simple priority list to think through when making decisions. This is what we should think through when making big life-changing decisions, but even small, everyday decisions. With small everyday decisions, we can't spend hours thinking through this list and praying over it every time. But we can think through categories of decisions, and then reevaluate from time to time. We always want to be humble. That means always growing and learning how to be more selfless and Christlike in our thoughts and behaviors.

A. **Heeding God's commands:** Is this explicitly forbidden/commanded?

There are some clear black and white commands in Scripture. We don't have to pray about if God wants us to commit adultery, murder, stealing, etc. There are clear lines, prohibitions for actions that go against God's design for us. Likewise, there are clear positive commands. But note that if something is commanded, is it wrong not to do at a given time (I.e. reading your Bible, it's not wrong not to do devotions at any given time)?

B. **Watching our heart motives:** Are my motives pure in this?

Am I driven by faith/hope/love or fear/jealousy/bitterness? We know that anything that doesn't come from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6; James 4:17). We should do whatever we do because we believe it pleases God. We know God commands us to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). Those fundamental motives of faith and love should drive everything that we do. We also want to ask ourselves, "Why am I making disciples/edifying the church/building God's kingdom? Is this for God's glory and honor or is this driven by my kingdom/pride/honor?" It's easy for self to unwittingly be driving us even when doing spiritual things.

- C. **Prioritizing God's plan and purpose:** How does this fit into God's purpose, plan, and values?

We may have genuinely good motives of wanting to love and care because we believe something is what God wants (and God will be pleased by our faith), but we can still just be ignorant of His will. I'm sure many women pastors fall into this category. Others may genuinely evangelize and preach the gospel but have no connection with any local church because they misunderstand God's plan. Others may genuinely care for the poor, and yet think they can communicate the gospel without words (which is a half truth). We don't want to be overly critical of those who are genuinely seeking to honor the Lord, and yet at the same time, God has revealed His purpose and plan and wants us to align with what He is doing in the world. His plan ultimately is to exalt Jesus by building His body the church, and the life and gifts He has given us are all meant to further that sacred purpose He has entrusted to us. So we want to make sure we really understand the Word to know God's plan and purpose for us in the world and how He intends for us to live that out, each in the sphere where He has placed us in.

- D. **Humbly seeking biblical wisdom:** Is this biblically wise?

Lastly, there can be choices that simply don't embody God's wisdom. All of the key questions on this list overlap quite a bit. But here, we want to evaluate how this decision fits with the whole of God's counsel. Often we can have the big picture of what God wants, and genuinely be seeking to please the Lord, but the way we go about things doesn't embody God's way. For example, in parenting we can subtly fall into bribing our kids and giving them rewards to get them to do what is right rather than shepherding their hearts, training them through patient teaching and modeling, and gently correcting them. Our desire can be good, the thing we are doing is good, but we are missing God's methods.

Even in missions, well meaning missionaries can give their lives to go to another country to spread the gospel, but maybe they aren't culturally aware, and so are passing off their culture as good rather than understanding how the gospel applies to another culture. At times well meaning missionaries have missed training up locals to lead and have unintentionally set themselves up as the experts who alone know truth, and so a movement doesn't spread. Likewise, some church planting movements (discipleship making movement) emphasize training up leaders and spreading immediately, and undervalue the importance of the qualifications for elders. These movements can start quickly and spread, but in the long term are they spreading solid biblical Christianity, or a form of moralism or pagan religion in the dress of Christianity?

We need to be asking: Am I seeking the advice of others? Have I considered the long term effects of this? Is this done God's way? Remember that sometimes the wisest choice looks foolish to the world, is risky, and/or sacrificial. So we need to be very careful not to just call something wise because it is safe. God's wisdom is not the wisdom of the world, and so we need much humility to seek out what God says.

- E. How does this list of four priorities help us help others?

- At first, you may think that this list is just good for yourself, helping you to make biblical decisions. But ultimately, this helps us to know how to guide and help others. We need to know how to help people think through things biblically. We won't give good counsel from the Word if we don't understand how the Word applies to all of life.

- Secondly, we want to foster faith, and help people think through how to study and apply the Bible to their hearts and will on their own. If we don't understand the different ways Scripture applies to our choices, we will treat wisdom matters like commands and commands like wisdom matters. We will miss the heart motives and desires and focus on externals or focus on the heart and miss biblical wisdom.

F. Table Discussion: How will we be misguided in our discipleship if we mistake the different steps for one another? Give practical examples.

#### IV. Wisdom

If what we want more than anything is to know and be like God, then we need humility to recognize that we have far to go! The number one foundational truth about wisdom, is that if you want to be wise, you have to recognize that you are not.

*Proverbs 1:7; 4:7-8; 8:22-23; 9:10*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

*"The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding.*

*"Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her."*

*"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. "From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth."*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

The key to truly being wise is to be humble, desperate for God's wisdom. That is at its essence what the fear of the Lord is, an acknowledgement that God is awesome and we are not.

*Proverbs 2:4-5; 3:3-4; 4:13*

*If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God.*

*Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.*

*Take hold of instruction; do not let go. guard her, for she is your life.*

The moment you think you are wise, you prove you are not. Because if you think you are wise, you will rely on your own wisdom rather than seeking out God's wisdom. It's easy to get to the point where we think we have life figured out, it's going how we want. But the fundamental question is, how do we define success? Is success defined from our perspective or God's? When we think we are successful we won't be seeking God and how He wants us to live.

*Proverbs 3:5-7*

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.*

Wisdom is something you need **before** the decision comes. We are making thousands of decisions every day, and don't realize that they are leading us somewhere. Once we've made a bad decision, it's too late.

*Proverbs 1:24-31*

*“Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; And you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, When your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. “Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. “They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof. “So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices.””*

The beautiful part of wisdom is that if you have it, it will guide every decision you make, and will be guarding you even when you don’t realize it.

*Proverbs 2:10-12; 4:6*

*For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things...*

*“Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; love her, and she will watch over you.”*

A wise man loves correction, otherwise, how would we know we are wrong? No one can see their own blind spots.

*Proverbs 3:11-13; 27:6*

*My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord Or loathe His reproof, For whom the Lord loves He reproves, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding.*

*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.*

Wisdom comes from God and not experience. Experience can actually appear wise, but not be based on God’s truth.

*Job 32:8-9*

*“But it is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding. “The abundant in years may not be wise, Nor may elders understand justice.””*

We all have blind spots, we need the mirror of the Word to show us where they are.

*Psalms 19:12*

*Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.*

**A. Why does wisdom matter for discipleship?**

- If we don’t have biblical wisdom, we will just be giving worldly wisdom to the people we are discipling. If we don’t have a biblical understanding of our need for wisdom, we won’t be desperate to go to God’s Word to understand how to think through every issue. If there isn’t a common understanding in discipleship that **both** parties desperately need God’s input and direction, the foundation for the relationship will be wrong, and conversations won’t be about how God’s Word applies to our life.

**B. Table Discussion: What happens if we let experience define success? How can we let the world define success?**

- V. We need dependence and patience in ministering the Word because faith is the goal!

We need to let the Spirit do His work and trust the power of the gospel. Our goal is to build and **strengthen faith**, and so we want each person's conscience to be convinced from the Word. This requires much patience! Paul models this powerfully all throughout 2nd Corinthians!

*2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 5:11-12*

*Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves...*

*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.*

What is the difference between a wisdom issue, and a right/wrong issue? How do we treat them differently? The Bible isn't subjective, but you aren't the official arbiter of truth either! We need to make sure that we are not discipling based on our preferences, but on Biblical standards and truth.

*James 4:10-12*

*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?*

*1 Corinthians 4:1-7*

*Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*

We need to correct heretics gently with the Word, how much more brothers and sisters (2 Tim. 2:24-26)!

## VI. We and those we are helping desperately need truth all the time!

### A. Sin deceives so we need truth

Speaking the truth in love is how we help each other grow to be more like Christ (Eph. 4:15, 17-25).

Unbelief is what makes hearts evil, which is why we need to **encourage** each other not to be tricked by sin (Heb. 3:12-14).

### B. We need to constantly rehearse truth and meditate on it

Meditating day and night is what makes us strong (Ps. 1:2-3)!

Discipleship is thinking through and applying the word in the everyday situations of life (Deut. 6:4-9).

God calls us to teach and admonish each other with all wisdom, as the Word is dwelling in us

*Colossians 3:15-17*

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 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. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*

## VII. Small Group Discussion Questions

- Which of the four priorities in biblical decision making do you tend to ignore when helping others (1. minimizing clear commands, 2. missing the heart motives, 3. neglecting God's plan and purpose, 4. not trusting God's wisdom)?
- When have you made a disciple in your own image or gave worldly wisdom because you were wise in your own eyes?
- How does understanding our necessity for biblical wisdom help us make disciples more faithfully?

## VIII. Homework

Carve out time this week to have at least a 30 minute conversation (preferably with someone from class), and discuss how biblical wisdom helps us make disciples:

- Discuss how experience can subtly undermine God's wisdom. When discipling, how do we slip into forming people in our image or worldly wisdom instead of into God?
- Discuss how understanding the different four biblical priorities (1. heeding God's commands, 2. watching our heart motives, 3. prioritizing God's plan/purpose, 4. humbly seeking biblical wisdom) helps us be more thoroughly biblical in our discipleship.
- Discuss how culture, background, bias can easily shape how we make disciples rather than the sufficiency of the Word.
- Write up a short summary of your conversation and what you learned.