

SERIES Four Chairs of Discipleship
 SERMON **What It Is (Matthew 16.24–26)**
 PASTOR Carl S. Sweatman
 LOCATION Church of Christ at Manor Woods (Rockville, MD)
 DATE 18-Sept-2022

1. A WORLD OF INFLUENCERS

“influencers” in our culture → known because they let you know

When I was in College, I was on the golf team.... And if anyone starts to wonder: “I don’t remember seeing you any televised College tournament,” or even “I didn’t know your College had a golf team,” there’s a reason for that. We were basically horrible, and our school was a small(ish) Christian College. So, no TV coverage for us. But here’s the thing: we didn’t really care that we were horrible, or that in nearly every tournament we played (*against bigger schools with better players*), our best finish was third...to last. We just loved to play, and we loved going to new courses—especially when all of it got us out of classes.

Well, at one tournament, after hearing the basic rules and reminders, we got assigned to our individual groups. This meant: four players, one from each school, so that no one school’s team dominated in a particular group. (*Didn’t matter for us. We were going to get smacked around anyway*). And to do this, the coach overseeing the tournament would call out names, and then those players would huddle together to form the group. The four names for my group were called, but only three of us showed. Since this was my first tournament, I asked one of the other guys, “So, is it cool for only three players in the group?” He smiled and said, “No, the fourth guy’s here.... He always appears late. He likes to make an entrance.”

I looked around and realized that the only people there were other players, coaches, and maybe the occasional friend or family member. And so, I asked: “An entrance for whom? Does this dude think he’s playing at Augusta?” The guy smiled again and said, “You’ll see. I’ve played alongside him before.” Then when coach made the last call for players, he got to our missing guy, and we heard a loud voice out of nowhere say, “Here!” At that, the puddle of golfers standing around parted, and it seemed like time when into slow motion and a dramatic soundtrack started playing. Because this dude proudly strode onto the scene looking like Tiger Woods. And that’s not exaggerating. The shoes, slacks, shirt, hat (*which the dude shaped in the same way*), the glove, bag, clubs, and even the specific head-covers.

But it didn’t stop with just the look. The walk was the same. The tone and rhythm of his speaking were the same. And while all of this slow-motion, dramatic sound-track is going on, the guy next to me says: “This dude has watched everything that has Tiger Woods in it. He’s read everything Tiger has ever written and whatever other book is out there about Tiger. He’s studied everything about Tiger’s swing so that he can duplicate it.... The dude is a bit obsessed.” Another guy in our group leaned in and said, “A ‘bit obsessed’ is a bit of an understatement.” And sure enough, the claim that this dude studied everything about Tiger to be like Tiger was proven true. Not just on the first tee (*where everyone is watching*), but throughout the entire round. The pre-shot routine was the same, the swing was the same, and even the finishing pose and/or club-twirl was the same.

Seriously, aside from the fact that the dude was white, 5’6” and maybe 150lbs, you’d think he was Tiger Woods. He proved that he truly watched, read, and practiced everything Tiger does, and he sought to conform everything about himself to be like Tiger. We might even say he was a committed, long-time faithful student of Tiger Woods. But a student who was not content with learning about (*or even from*) Tiger. He was a student who wanted to model Tiger. And that brings me to an important question: what would happen if believers today gave that level of commitment and long-term learning to becoming more and more like Christ? (*And I’m setting to one side the fact that such a commitment is a biblical command and expectation for those who claim to be faithful disciples of Jesus*).

Or let’s make the question more pronounced: in the light of what we discovered in our brief series through Heb 1, where Jesus Christ is superior to all else in life; does He truly matter that much to us that would give our lives to learning everything about Him, practicing what He does, and that we would desire to conform everything about ourselves to become like Christ? And are we prepared to live that Christ-changed, Christ-given, and Christ-like life in such a faithful and devoted manner that the world around us knows who we are, and whose we are?

[intro for series]—prayer for the youth (and their “Core 52” study)

—PRAY—

2. CLEAR ON PERSPECTIVE

For a little over a year now, a running theme in our time together has been the necessary link between identity and mission. A theme that reveals a basic truth: “**who we are defines what we do.**” This is the opposite of how the world sees things. The world says: “**we are what we do**”—i.e., our actions define us. The world also says: “**we are who we choose to be**”—i.e., our identities are defined by the realities we create for ourselves for our own benefit and status. But the NT reveals: true life is formed and given by God alone, and that He has given us this true life with a new identity. One we could never form for ourselves, but God does in Christ.

And because we’re remade in the image of Christ, everything about us must reflect that new identity and must be faithfully lived to glorify Him alone—knowing that all of it must be done in accordance with God’s wisdom, not ours. So, as Paul says: “**it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me**” (Gal 2.20). Thus, there is a categorical difference between the life we had before Christ and the life we now have because of Christ. A difference meant to be lived in visible and recognizable ways to reveal the change that Christ makes real in our lives. Always. Thus, identity and mission cannot be relegated to the comparative few moments we gather and do life together within the walls of this building. Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not denigrating the need for weekly gatherings.

Part of being the “church” (*which is not a building, but a body of believers*) means we come together as one people, united in One name, to worship, pray, study, learn, grow, be held accountable, and to be encouraged. All of that is vital, necessary, and even commanded for the body of believers to do (see Heb 10.22–25). But being the “church” also means faithfully heeding the weekly charge to leave this building as Christ’s representatives and enter into the daily mission field outside of these walls. Or to borrow from Jesus: we are called to be visible

lights in the dark world (see Mt 5.14–16). And being visible lights means we cannot hide our faith under a basket of only shining in a building. To do so neglects and even subverts the very nature of what means to be the light God has created and called us to be.

You see, light not only expels darkness, and darkness—as the NT teaches—is the current condition of the world because of evil and sin. But light also provides hope for those in darkness and who do not know the way out. The gospel proclaims that the true Light of the World has come to rescue us and provide not only the way out of the world’s darkness but also the new life to be had in His glorious eternal kingdom. That is the message of hope we are called to let define us and to declare to others. So, if Christ commissions us to be lights in a dark world, we fail to live it out and fulfill it when we hide from the world (*i.e., when we privatize our faith*), and refuse to allow the light to shine upon those who sit and live in the darkness. And Jesus explains the reason for living out His commission to be lights in a dark world. Listen to what He says: “**Let your light shine before people, so that they can see your good works and give honor to your Father in heaven**” (Mt 5.16). It’s about pointing people to God through the transformed life He’s made possible and real in those who belong to Him.

Thus, when believers allow the light of God’s truth to shine through them and out into a dark world, they are obediently and faithfully fulfilling His commission to be representatives of the radically redefined new life in Christ. And that obedient faithfulness is both honorable to God and captivating for those who do not know or have the new life that only God gives. They’ll want to know why we live the way we do. What brought about the noticeable change in our lives. And how we can carry on in this chaotic and broken world with such clarity and hope. They’ll want to know such things (*and so much more*) because they recognize the categorical difference about who we are. An identity that’s not been relegated to a very small handful of hours given to one or two days a week, or that’s been kept private so as to avoid challenging questions or even criticisms. Instead, it’s an identity that’s been faithfully lived on a daily basis and graciously maintained in all circumstances.

But that type of visible, faithful, and resolute living does not happen automatically nor is it something done with minimal effort. And it is most certainly not something to be sought and achieved in isolation from other believers. Instead, the visible, faithful, and resolute life in Christ is the result of a life-long commitment to discipleship. What we might loosely call the “process” of (1) becoming conformed to the image of Christ by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, (2) continuing to mature and “**grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**” (2 Pet 3.16), (3) applying that grace and knowledge to our lives and our service to God (*and it’s not one or the other; it’s both*); and (4) lovingly striving with one another and encouraging each other to faithfully and humbly fulfill the call to be true disciples. Thus, and to borrow from Voddie Baucham: the heart of discipleship is relationship.

One that is both vertical (*i.e., our individual relationships with God*), and horizontal (*i.e., our communal relationship as the body of Christ*). And it’s a relationship that depends upon the interconnection between the vertical and horizontal. As we faithfully strengthen and grow in our individual relationships with God, we discover the closeness, unity, and importance of the relationship we share as the body of Christ. And as we faithfully strengthen and grow in our communal relationship, we discover not only how and where God has been at work among His people but also the innumerable reasons for giving Him our allegiance, praise, and worship. And when this twofold, interconnected relationship is not only made real and a vital

part of our daily lives but also that which determines how and why we live, it will not take long before the world around us starts to take notice. And in that taking notice, we are given the opportunities to share the reason for the new hope we have within us.

3. CLEAR ON MEANING

A new hope given by Christ Jesus, and one that is designed to radically redefine everything about us. Especially our new identity in Him and our new mission to be lived out for Him—i.e., disciples who make disciples of all nations in His matchless name for His glory and eternal kingdom. And that brings us to where we need to go now. We need to offer some clarity on the meaning of some key terms (*or concepts*) that have grown increasingly unclear—not just in the world but even within the church. Specifically, and for the purpose of this morning’s message, we want to know: what is a “disciple” and what does “discipling others” mean?

A disciple is one who has faithfully submitted to the truth and ways of God, received the salvation and rescue of Christ, is allowing the sanctifying and equipping work of the Holy Spirit to bring about God’s desired transformation in his or her life, and humbly lives out that new life in the context of God’s church and God’s world.

Discipling is faithfully embracing and living out the divine commission to proclaim the truth of the gospel message, lovingly guiding people through the process of spiritual rebirth, restoration, and renewal, so that they too can become disciples and therefore faithfully embrace and live out the same divine commission.

I admit, some might see both of these definitions as a tad wordy, open-ended, and clunky; and to a point, that’s true. But in some respects, they almost need to be in order to avoid bumper-sticker-theology-type answers to deep questions. I say that because the biblical concept of discipleship is profound and richly meaningful, and we ought to treat it in a way that respects its nature and depth.

1. What It Ain’t

That being the case, let’s unpack some of this by looking at what the whole of “discipleship” is not before we see what it is, which will then assist us in better understanding what “disciple” and “discipling” mean. Now, in saying, “what it’s not” I’m referring primarily to the common misconceptions people have about discipleship. For the sake of time, we’ll hit three of the big ones.

a. An Elective

The first says: discipleship happens in a short-term Bible Study, a one-off mission trip, new-members class, leadership seminar, or some 90-day plan. Each of these winds up devaluing what discipleship truly is—by trying to reduce it to the patience level of modern society and its desire for quick-fix solutions (*we’ll come back to that one shortly*). And they completely miss the NT’s meaning about discipleship. Moreover, these options cannot be seen as how true discipleship happens. Thus, we can’t sell the options with the claim, “**We promise that after this inspiring, motivational, and practical _____, you’ll be a full-fledged, card-carrying disciple and a fully-trained disciple-maker.**” And we certainly cannot offer some “**money-back**

guarantee” to get people “to give [Jesus] a 60-day trial.”¹ If things are pitched like that, then the one promoting it needs to go back and re-read the manual.

I say that because the NT never portrays discipleship as something achieved through a one-off elective class, study, mission, seminar, plan, or even a brief sermon series. And the NT doesn’t present discipleship as an optional or one-off elective that only a few might undertake if they so choose. Instead, the NT’s consistent picture of discipleship is a daily existence for the whole of one’s new. An existence that’s characterized by ongoing growth and maturity in one’s knowledge, faith, devotion, worship, and service to Jesus Christ. And the NT’s consistent picture of discipleship is that it defines the daily existence of all believers. All are expected to grow and mature in knowledge, faith, devotion, worship, and service to Jesus Christ, and all are commissioned to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28.19). Jesus was not ambiguous about the nature and scope of His expectations and to whom they applied.

b. Reserved for the “Gifted”

And that brings us to the second misconception about discipleship: it’s only reserved for those who are “gifted”—or as Dallas Willard describes it: “the super Christians.”² A common variant on this (*especially among those who have barely-rudimentary ideas about the Bible, inadequate views of Christ, and unhealthy perspectives about the church*) is that discipleship is really the Pastor’s job. After all, that’s what the members pay him to do, right? (*We’ll leave that unbiblical mindset aside for another time*). Whichever version we take—super Christians or super-Pastor—both operate on a twofold assumption that is not legitimate. Or biblical.

On the one hand, as Willard points out, some in the church believe: “It is entirely possible (*and permissible*) to confess to be a Christian without living as a disciple—let alone have any desire to pursue any form of discipleship.” (*Put another way: “It’s possible to be a convert without making any changes in life.” That’s not only a contradiction in terms but also a contradiction of clear, biblical teaching*). While on the other hand, some in the church believe: “The ministry of discipleship is best filled or carried out by only those who have a passion and ability for it.” But there is something else about all of this that must be recognized. In fact, it’s what ties the two hands together, thus imprisoning the true nature of discipleship. And that something else is the belief that says: “Being a disciple or engaging in discipleship is a separate category of the Christian life and is therefore optional. I’m not obligated to do it.”

All told: this view of discipleship basically seeks to avoid responsibility and accountability, as well as to downplay the clear expectations of Christ when it comes living as His true disciples. To come right out with it: this view of discipleship desires to maintain a superficial relationship with Christ and fellow-believers. Where claims of devotion to Christ and commitment to serve with others are boldly spoken, but the heart is not truly backing the claims. And it’s here that we need to recall two things. First, Christ Himself wasn’t interested in superficial or in-name-only followers, or even those who were more interested in the perks without the effort. And, secondly, Christ committed Himself to those who fully devoted themselves to Him and submitted to doing life according to His expectations. And a fundamental element of those expectations was: all true disciples are to be disciple-makers. No exceptions. No excuses.

¹ Yes, this is a thing. It was (unsurprisingly) said and offered by pastor Rick Warren back in 2008, when he was being interviewed by Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes on *Fox News*. You can watch/read [the details here](#).

² See D. Willard, *The Great Omission* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 3.

c. A Quick Fix

To segue into our last misconception, let's pause for an illustration. A few years ago, I got a book called, *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds—or Less*.³ In general, it's a helpful if you're needing advice on how to make great sale-pitches, to answer single questions in a concise way, or even to summarize big ideas and the research that went with them. In short: it's helpful for being successful in business-like transactions. Thus, it helps people learn how to speak with those who don't want to be saddled with loads of details. People who simply want the solution, and they want it now. Especially because, in the world of business, advertising, or entertainment, time is money. So K.I.S.S. is the golden rule.

But one of the ironies of the book. It's meant to show people how to make a point in 30 seconds or less. However, it's 120 pages long, takes about 2.5 hours to read, and very few of its main points are made in 30 seconds or less. And that reveals something of a key problem with this shot of book or approach: yes, it's entirely possible to state something quickly, but the process of explaining its meaning, or how it works, or how it is to be carried out; that requires far more time and energy.

Here's the point of the illustration: too many people view discipleship in the same way. They think it's something that can be done in some quick-fix approach. If it works in business, why not here? But here's what must be remembered: discipleship is not a business transaction. And the same goes for ministry. Discipleship and ministry are about the life-changing event of God's salvation in Christ, made real in the lives of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, while we might be able to get that point across in 30 seconds or less, the process of discipleship—and even the dialogue that must happen as the process unfolds—cannot be done in 30 seconds or less. To think that it should not only short-circuits the entire thing but also (*wrongly*) reduces it to bumper-sticker theology.

Or to say this bluntly (*in case I wasn't blunt already*): if anyone is only interested in a quick and easy version of salvation, or if anyone is only interested in Christianity without any sort of life-long spiritual development or formation (*i.e., discipleship*), that person is not truly interested in what God fully offers us in Christ, and what He achieves through the powerful work of His Holy Spirit. A work that unfolds, grows, and matures over a life-time, with the result being: the establishment and sustain of strong and healthy relationships between us and God as well as within the body of Christ. And all of being done in accordance with God's design.

2. What It Is

That brings us to understanding what discipleship is, as illustrated in this morning's passage. Quick word about the context for this passage. What Jesus says in Mt 16.24–26 is more or less a final push to get His followers to understand the scope of His identity and mission as well as theirs. And core part of that scope involves the expectation of self-sacrifice—as will be demonstrated to the utmost by Christ Himself. And specifically, what Jesus says in this passage follows Peter trying to keep Jesus from fulfilling His divine mission of salvation—a resistance that's met with a rather pointed responses from Jesus: “[Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me because you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's](#)” (Mt 16.23). That doesn't sound like a description of a true disciple, does it?

³ M.O. Frank, *How To Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds—or Less* (Simon and Schuster, 1986).

Think back to the first part of our definition: a disciple is one who faithfully submits to the truth and ways of God. But Peter's resistance to Jesus' identity and mission shows that he has not submitted to God's ways—i.e., God's salvation comes through the sacrifice of Christ. Rather he gives the impression that he's submitted (*or succumbed*) to the allure or appeal of the ways of humanity—i.e., the way of salvation that's meant to cater to humanity's desires and expectations. It's to this mindset of self-interest that Jesus says: “If anyone wants to become My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life, will lose it; but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it” (Mt 16.24–25). And we should recall that Jesus, in an earlier teaching, makes this deep level of commitment definitive for those who claim to belong to Him: “And whoever who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me” (Mt 10.38).

a. Living Commitment

That brings us to the first thing to recognize about true discipleship: it's a living commitment. One purposefully made to God in Christ and intentionally lived out by faithful believers daily. Thus, submission to the truth and ways of God in Christ is a willful, resolute allegiance. In fact, we see this in the language of the passage of Mt 16. The Greek word for “want” or “desire” (θέλω) means: to set one's will, to resolve, to be determined, or to do with intention. Thus, the desire to follow after Christ is not a passing fancy, something to try for fun, an elective, a line-item on a bucket list, or a 60-day trial-run. That kind of desire (*or that level of commitment*) is one based entirely on self-interested priorities, conveniences, or comfort-levels and the kinds of expectations or wishes people have for their own lives. A desire that asks: “What's in it for me? What can I get out of this experience? How will this enrich my life?”

But that desire, with that self-oriented focus, does not possess the level of commitment that Christ is asking of those who truly desire to belong to Him. In fact, He knows (*and warns people*): those who are self-interested are those who will give up when things get tough, or they will seek after other experiences when their ways of Christ appear boring or even too costly—i.e., they require more from the person than he or she is willing to sacrifice. And we have too much of this type of commitment in our world today, and it has sadly crept into the life of the church. It's a kind of commitment that cheapens the value, necessity, and weight of God's grace and the new life He desires to give. Or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it:

“[This] is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of the sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion [*i.e., fellowship*] without confession, [*i.e., membership*] absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ—living and incarnate.”⁴

In short: cheap grace allows one to define discipleship as merely declaring allegiance to Christ as Savior while refusing to be truly committed to Him as Lord. It makes it easy for people to call themselves Christians but ignore the need to become true disciples. It makes it

⁴ D. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (Simon and Schuster, 1995), 44–45.

easy to claim a new identity but still live life in accordance with the old one. But not one bit of biblical revelation says such grace is God's grace, nor is such discipleship what He expects.

b. Living Sacrifice

The second thing about true discipleship is by far the more complicated. Some might say the most demanding. And rightfully so.... Discipleship is a life of daily self-sacrifice. (*It's Luke's Gospel that shows Jesus giving the emphasis on "daily"—see Lk 9.23c*). Now, the "sacrifice" in mind involves two things: (1) the denial of the self, and (2) taking up one's cross. Both of these are inexorably linked, and Jesus does not allow any opportunity for them to become an either-or. Just like identity and mission: it's both-and. Let's consider each one briefly.

As you can imagine, the thing that Jesus describes as "denying oneself" is quite specific. The terminology is explicitly and purposefully chosen. It should be noted: when Jesus says, "deny oneself," it does not mean: **"Refrain from the conveniences or pleasures in life once a year so that you can focus on me better for that short, revered period."** Rather, the Greek term used for "deny" is ἀπαρνέομαι (*aparneomai*), which means renounce all affiliation, association, connection, or relationship with someone *or* even some thing. A denying or renouncing that is to be a daily practice for the rest of one's life. And notice that the object of denial is very personal—i.e., the self. And to be clear, and consistent with the rest of the NT, the "self" being denied here is, first of all, what Paul calls the "old self"—i.e., the life before the rescuing and saving and sanctifying work of God. Thus, one must deny that old way of life.

And secondly: this denial also involves a denial of the human will or the ways of humanity. It means surrendering what we want, what we desire, what we think is best, what we believe God should do—you know...Peter's response to Jesus. To deny oneself, therefore, is to sever ties with our priorities, our ambitions, and our ways, and to submit ourselves completely to the ways of God and allow His Spirit to work within us so that our desires and priorities are radically changed. This echoes what David means when he says in Ps 37: **"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart"** (Ps 37.4, NASB). And to be clear: this verse is not permission to see God as our personal vending machine. Instead, it's about the transformation we undergo when we truly submit to Him and His ways. Thus, His desires become our desires, so that what we do for Him reflects what He does in us.

Now, to get back to the Mt 16 passage: the denial of self proves its seriousness and loyalty by what's seen in the second part of the image: taking up one's cross. People have thought this means all sorts of things. For example, some think Jesus is talking about enduring the random, occasional, and temporary burdens of life. Thus, when we struggle with money, personal issues, job situations, challenging co-workers, or even (*heaven help us*) political appointments and disappointments, it's sometimes shrug it off by saying, **"Well, we all have our crosses to bear."** But that is most certainly not what Jesus is talking about. I say that partly because these sorts of events are things that happen beyond our control. They are things we would love to avoid if we could, but aren't able to make that choice. But what Jesus says is: taking up one's cross is a deliberate choice. It's willingly, freely, and intentionally entering into that which we would otherwise love to avoid.

But what we enter into is so much more than troublesome trivialities of life. For Jesus, the notion of taking up one's cross is a picturesque way of describing the true nature of what it

means to be His true followers. To be those who seek to be made in His image and follow in His ways faithfully no matter what. And as we discover in the wider context of the passage, an essential component of that image-bearing is self-sacrifice. The very thing that Christ Himself does and thus models for us. He willingly, freely, intentionally, and humbly carries out the ways of God, culminating in self-sacrifice. Or as Paul says in Phil 2.5–8: Christ’s faithful obedience displayed itself in a denial (*i.e., setting aside His equality with God so as to be made equal with us*), and taking up a cross (*i.e., submitting Himself to the definition of rejection and shame—and, quite literally, bearing its weight on Himself for our sake*).

And Paul prefaces this humble image by saying to believers: “[Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus](#)” (Phil 2.5, NASB). Therefore, to be Christ’s true disciple is to be one who knows the cost involved—a cost to be paid right up front (*new life begins only when the old life dies*)—and who willingly submits to it, because it is only through that absolute submission that one becomes truly Christ-like and therefore united with Him in a daily life of self-sacrificing devotion to God. Or to quote from Bonhoeffer again:

“the cross is not the terrible end to our otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work and follow him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call.”⁵

c. Living Walk

But this life of self-sacrifice—of self-denial and taking up one’s cross—is not the end of the story, nor is it to be all that defines the life of true, faithful disciples. Rather, there is a way of living that comes out of a life of sacrifice—a resurrection, of sorts. As Paul says: “[For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of His resurrection. We know that our old man was crucified with Him, so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin](#)” (Rom 6.5–6). And as we’ve stressed many times: when the old self is put off, God is the one who gives us a new self—one made in the likeness of Christ: righteous, holy, and true.

And once we receive this new life, we are all expected to faithfully and obediently live it out as His disciples. We are all to be those who have submitted to the truth and ways of God, those who live as His representatives and light-bearers in a lost and dark world. And we do not live out this new life in isolation or as members of a spiritual country club—believing that our Christian existence belongs only to us, or that it’s not really necessary to show it to the rest of the world. Rather we live out this new life by bearing witness to the complete transformation that God brings in our lives, and in doing so we show others—by our living walk—what true life can be. A life not of ourselves, but a life given to us by God in Christ; and a life made real in our daily lives by the powerful, ongoing, and purifying work of the Holy Spirit.

And when such a life is truly made real and a vital part of our daily lives, and when it becomes that which determines how and why we live so differently in the world, it won’t take long before the world around us starts to take notice. And in that taking notice, we are then given

⁵ D. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (Simon and Schuster, 1995), 89–90.

the opportunities to share the reason for the new hope we have within us. A new hope from a new life that God in Christ has given us and is equally ready to provide for them. A provision that will not only radically redefine everything about them, but also being to reveal the innumerable reasons for giving Him all of the glory, praise, and worship He truly deserves.

[close]

DISMISSAL

J.B. Phillips, in his "Translator's Preface" to, *Letters to Young Churches* (1947) astutely said: "Many Christians today talk about the "difficulties of our times" as though we should have to wait for better ones before the Christian religion can take root. It is heartening to remember that this faith took root and flourished amazingly in conditions that would have killed anything less vital in a matter of weeks. These early Christians were on fire with the conviction that they had become, through Christ, literal sons of God; they were pioneers of a new humanity, founders of a new kingdom. They still speak to us across the centuries. Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we might achieve what they achieved."

Prayer for the Meal