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Title: Week 3 - Discipleship Pathway 5 (Love)

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Introduction

- So let me start by asking this question - have you ever wrestled with this issue?
 - You come to know and follow Christ - and you are CONVINCED it means everything
 - And then you wonder some logical questions...
 - * Does this mean I should be a pastor? Or a missionary?
 - * Or maybe we wonder, why should I even get married and have children? - Isn't that a distraction to the Great Commission?
 - * Or, why am I working at a secular company or as a student why am I studying math that has no real spiritual value, right?
 - I know I wrestled a lot with these questions and I think many do...especially lay people
 - * Can have this constant...low level guilt...or inferiority complex as a Christian - that I am honestly living a sub-Christian life and people who do "ministry" are REALLY the ones loving God and loving people
 - And my role is just to make money and give to the church
 - Well, I think the fact that the people of God's church have FELT that 2nd class citizen feeling is a failure of the church and a lot of times PASTORS like myself...that have taught the Scripture not in fullness and balance
 - * But, the ordinary callings of life - family, the local church, the workplace - ARE the EXACT places God wants you to be...and where He wants us to share the fruit of love - and KNOW...you ARE NOT a 2nd class kingdom citizen
 - And so that's what I want to unpack today through Discipleship Pathway #5 - Love
 - * ***Psalm 1:3 - He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.***
 - * And the picture of the tree is that of fruit of love for others - the holy sap of joy flows through the righteous trunk and branches...and overflows into wonderful, full, life-giving fruit...for others to eat and live
- But if I were to use the picture of the tree and expand it further - we'd say that love concentrates itself generally into 5 fruits or what in JOAN we'll call the "5 Spheres of Love"
 - 1. Family, 2. Church, 3. Work, 4. Society, and 5. World
 - * Now, just so you don't think I'm being totally novel, but the Protestant Reformers and specifically Martin Luther also thought about this idea of "spheres" or what he called "estates", others have said these are our "callings"
 - And so, through some wrestling personally, with the Word, and wisdom from others - I landed on these 5 spheres of love...so lets unpack them together

1. Family

Introduction

- Will Durant was a 20th century writer who studied human civilizations extensively and came to this profound, but simple conclusion - "Family is the nucleus of civilization"

- And if we think of the atom bomb - do you know how it worked? - It's destructive energy comes from breaking apart the nucleus of the atom
- In the same way - when the family is healthy in a civilization - generally there is health
 - * When a family is being broken and dysfunctional - there will be destructive, atomic consequences in that society
- So at JOAN - we want to work really hard at our church at developing healthy marriages and healthy and loved and flourishing children...because it is so foundational to everything else in a healthy society

1. Marriage

- ***Genesis 2:24 - Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.***
 - Let me answer this question: Why is marriage so worth focusing on making healthy?
- **1. We work on making healthy marriages because it is created to be life-long**
 - Brothers and sisters, I just want us to consider the uniqueness of the marriage relationship compared to any other relationship - where we lived with our parents or children for a season, we work a job for a season, we live in a city for a season...but marriage of all relationships...is meant to be permanent - a lifelong covenant...THEREFORE because of marriage's lifelong nature...it needs the MOST attention and tending like a garden of ANY human relationship we have
- **2. We work on making healthy marriages because it is a parable of the Gospel**
 - Of all the human relationships - probably no other relationship is AS EMBUED with Gospel meaning as the marriage of husband and wife - Paul says marriage is a parable of the Gospel - of Christ and the Church
 - * And so our fight to keep marriage together through even the worst times (though the Scripture does give certain permissions for divorce) - shows that Christ and Church are in an eternal covenant...that Christ will never abandon His Bride
- **3. We work on making healthy marriages because it is so joyful and so hard**
 - Your marriage - brings you great joy, pleasure, friendship, companionship...more significant than any other relationship on earth
 - * And so we want to give it focus...because of how much life and strength your marriage can give you
 - But also, it is likely that your marriage - has also brought you some of your greatest pain, frustration, arguments, need for repentance, forgiveness
 - Marilyn and I - our #1 question in the first year of marriage was - "Why are you like that?"
 - * We are SO DIFFERENT - and 15 years later...we're STILL very different
 - And I share that to say - if you feel like marriage is hard...don't feel like you're alone
 - And so one of the MAJOR roles of JOAN that we want to be about is...we want to do all we can...to strengthen the marriage relationship

2. Parenting

- ***Genesis 1:28 - And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."***
 - Question: Why is parenting our children so worth focusing on making healthy?

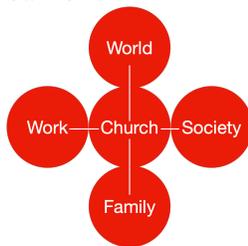
- **1. In discipling children we make our greatest contribution to society's common good**
 - One of our jobs as parents with the years we have with our children is simply to develop good human beings - through love and affection, through discipline and obedience, and through development of their gifts and talents
 - * Our prayer is one day that they leave us and become productive members of society
 - And again, we may not realize it, but the greatest contribution we can give society is having loving, stable, orderly homes...that Lord-willing produce good, stable, and productive members of society
 - We will talk about Justice in society, but let me introduce you to the idea of ordinary and extraordinary works of Justice. We often in our minds run to extraordinary Justice (trafficking) - but the more we do ordinary Justice (raising children well) the greater aggregate good to society
- **2. In discipling children we make our greatest contribution to the Great Commission**
 - The Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations, right?
 - * And most of the time we think - that means evangelizing to neighbors or doing global missions
 - But, the reality is...the largest percentage of Christians in the world...are Christian because they were raised in Christian homes
 - * Thus, the raising of children in Christian faith...is actually the most important way we advance the Gospel to the next generation and around the world
 - So especially I know the mom's in this room feel this weight so much - the majority spend the most time at least with the children
 - * And its not easy and maybe you feel the hardships and wonder if what you are doing is MEANINGFUL
 - But parents, especially mothers...God sees you - you labor in the Lord is not in vain...God is doing something SO VALUABLE for His kingdom through this work of raising children...it just takes time - we're marinating them not microwaving them
- **Caveat**
 - Now, hearing that - some of us are going to say - OK, but what if I raise 2, 3, 5 children and they are not productive members of society and they aren't believers in Christ?
 - * And the answer to that is - we certainly don't have ultimate control over that...and that's a heartache we need to give to the Lord and constantly pray for change in our children's hearts
 - But, I share these points for us to have more aggregate versus individual thinking about the importance of Christian child-rearing
 - * That if we as the church of Jesus Christ didn't do our job of equipping parents to disciple their children well
 - As a WHOLE...we'd be hurting society and we'd be hurting the cause of the Great Commission
 - In future lectures I'll be giving more detail about HOW we as a church plan to equip parents well

3. Other family relationships

- Now, I know I have emphasized marriage and children relationships - but, please know that as a church we recognize there are OTHER family relationships that are important - aging parents, adult children, grandchildren, siblings, cousins, nephews and nieces...and then there are singles maybe by divorce or being widowed...or sometimes life-long singles
 - All of those dynamics are important to us and we want to disciple well in all those unique family dynamics as well

2. Church

- OK, so what place does the Church have in the “spheres of love”
 - One way to think about it is...you can say CHURCH is like the HUB of the wheel...it is God’s ordained instrument to give health and strength TO LOVE in family, work, society, and global love



- More to say later, but for now, I’m going to just talk about two things - Corporate Worship and Life Groups
- **1. Corporate Worship**
 - Now there is actually considerable debate on how the Sabbath applies to us as Christians, but let me share a few verses here and then the perspective of our denomination and JOAN
 - The OT 4th commandment was to rest and honor God on the 7th day, Saturday - ***Exodus 20:8 - “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.***
 - In the NT, because Christ rose on Sunday, the 1st day of the week...worship patterns changed from Saturday to Sunday
 - * ***Acts 20:7 - On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.***
 - * ***Revelation 1:10 - I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet***
 - So, practically what that means is - we hold in high regard Sunday as the Lord’s Day - as a holy day and therefore we ought to be present in corporate worship every Sunday as much as is possible unless there are special circumstances that prevent you
 - Now can churches get legalistic and be unreasonably rigid about this? - Yes, and I’ve seen and experienced that
 - * But in JOAN, I hope we can be a people that highly value corporate worship and make it a priority to be present every Sunday unless special circumstances prevent us
 - Now, I know that is almost archaic and it is swimming upstream in our culture because of youth sports and also COVID made live-streaming such an attractive option

* But know the HEART of that...IS NOT to be legalistic and its NOT for my sake (though maybe it seems like it because I'm the pastor...and what pastor doesn't want the seats filled right?)...but please hear the heart...our plea is simply because we believe corporate worship is a God-ordained medicine He created our souls to partake weekly for us to be spiritually vibrant and healthy

• 2. Life Groups

- Now, beyond Sundays, another conviction we have is that Christians should be in fellowship in such a way that we are known by others and actually accountable...to one another, but also specifically Elders of the church
- A couple Scriptures that inform those convictions:
 - * ***Hebrews 10:25 - not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.***
 - Scripture says we need regular encouragement, regular meeting...to stay encouraged and to walk with Jesus
 - * ***Acts 20:28 - Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.***
 - Also, it says Elders need to have oversight of the flock in a way that they can care for them spiritually to help them walk with Jesus and not wander
- And so our conviction of how we want to do that is through “Life Groups”
 - * As I said, I'll share more about that in following weeks...but for now, I'll just say - part of our membership requirements will be - every member of our church will be placed in a Life Group
 - Now, the minimum request is you seek to come to the Community week (which is once a month)
 - * And also one of our structures for Elders is - my hope is each Life Group with somehow be accountable to an Elder for oversight to know the needs of the flock
- But again - know the heart is - Life Groups are for our spiritual good...not meant to be a burden, but a joy and strength you look forward to - to receive and to give
- Remember again the key of how we see church calling - it's the hub of the wheel of love - as we are loved, receive, and love - we can in that strength love in other callings - family, work, society, world

3. Work

- Not sure about you, but I know I grew up with a very shoddy and incomplete theology of work - where work was mainly to make money, so you can give it to church...and hopefully you can witness to non-Christians at work
 - Now those things are good and true - but so incomplete
- ***Genesis 1:28 - And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”***
 - So we are called from the very beginning to image God in that we were given authority to rule over the earth and be sub-creators under Creator God

- * A helpful paradigm for me was that God placed us in a Garden in Genesis...but the end of the story is we are to end up in a City in Revelation
 - And so God's intent for our work is to glorify Him...by taking the unlimited potential found in this earth and applying our gifts to create beautiful things that honor God and serve people
- So let me share a couple thoughts to chew on - to show HOW necessary our work is
 - ◉ First, think though about ALL the physical things that needed to be in place for us to even be here to worship
 - * You woke up in a bed, from an alarm clock, turned on a sink and shower with running water, put on clothes - and for all those things...we're all grateful right?
 - * You drove here in a car, there were traffic lights to keep you from accidents, there is law enforcement who governs the rules of the road, there are local political leaders who help make decisions on roads and construction and budgets
 - * So brothers and sisters...our earthly worship of God...CANNOT be separated from the physical world we live in...that requires beautiful, good, productive work that we do
 - And God is honored and people are loved through it
 - ◉ Second, consider the work even that is done in this room...and how wonderfully it serves and reflects God and His kingdom
 - * Lenie - works as a Middle School Assistant Principle - he is aiding students especially many from challenging home situations to be able to learn, to be able to overcome social challenges and discipline issues...so they can become successful and productive people
 - * Jennifer - has a Montessori school in her basement basically to help disciple her children in the Lord but also in basics of learning. And also there are other Chinese families that have their children there and think of what a blessing it is that they can be educated by someone who can do it in their own language but also English and help them as immigrants to a new country thrive...but also be exposed to a Christian family
 - And FOR ALL OF US - one way to think of the value of your work is to think...what if you were gone...what would this world lose without your work?
 - Your good work pictures the order and love of God who takes a chaotic creation and subdues it and gives it order and blessing
- So brothers and sisters I hope you feel DEEPLY from me as your pastor...that I and this church VALUES what you do Monday-Saturday
 - ◉ Yes I believe Sunday is important because we come to worship God...but also - Sunday exists to strengthen YOU to worship God on Monday-Saturday...especially in your work callings - to do it excellently unto the Lord

4. Society

- Now, what is meant by this sphere of love called “society”?
 - ◉ Well, I think what we’re trying to get at is this - that we believe Christ’s redemption is MORE than just the saving of our souls, but He is redeeming the entire creation

- * ***Romans 8:21 - that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.***
 - I used this phrase before but a helpful idea is to say we want “All of Christ for All of Life”
 - So everything from our laws, our culture, our social structures - we long to see it all transformed so we see the flourishing of the places we live
- Now having said this - lets be aware that there are typically two errors that have occurred in the Christian church historically - either only caring about eternal souls or only caring about social concerns
- So, being aware of those twin errors, let me speak to a few principles that help us govern how to think about this idea of “All of Christ for All of Life”
 - **1. There is a primacy of the eternal to the temporal - Evangelism priority**
 - * Tim Keller in his book generous justice says this, “[It] is not true [that] the spiritual is more important than the physical, but [it is true that] the eternal is more important than the temporal”
 - * John Piper says it like this, “Christians care about all suffering, but especially eternal suffering”
 - And thus, because we really believe there is an eternal wrath God will pour on sinners in hell - the most loving and urgent passion of the Christian MUST BE for people to come to the knowledge of Christ and be saved
 - **2. We want to impact the temporal in the areas of culture-building, mercy, and justice - Social concern**
 - * Culture-building - what I mean here is...we want to be people who are part of our cities in meaningful and positive ways - so you are involved locally in HOAs, sports, businesses, schools, and city development
 - * Mercy - there will be people on the margins in any society...so we specifically look to meet the needs of the poor and marginalized
 - * Justice - there are often legal and systemic barriers of injustice for people, especially the marginalized...and so we are actively seeking for just governance in the public square
 - Now, this raises a question for many of well, how politically engaged should the church be?
 - And I would say this phrase as a principle - “The Church is to be the conscience of the State”
 - The Church is responsible to speak clearly and prophetically to moral and spiritual issues that the State is involved with, but we leave the details of debatable policy to governing officials
 - **3. Individuals can pursue their passions, but the church will prayerfully choose strategic targets amongst evangelism and social concerns**
 - * What I mean here is - listen - there’s a million needs out there in the world - and everyone here has things they are passionate about
 - And what I’d say is...we want to encourage individuals to give themselves to their passion and burden

- So as a church we want to make known what you can do especially in your own city
- But, as a church, we want to be wise and judicious of what we give our energy to
 - But our BASE energy will always be to our bread and butter - church gathered and church scattered
 - But then, year by year the Elders of the church will pray and ask the Lord if He's asking us to pursue a certain specific new initiative and make that a church pursuit - specific in the area of evangelism, culture building, mercy, or justice
- * But one area that I can say is a strategic focus for us as a church already is a specific evangelistic burden in this church to reach Hindus and Muslims for Christ - because that is who the Lord has brought into this city and a large reason of why we've been called to plant this church
 - And so when we close this service and do announcements - we actually have a special gift we want to give everyone here related to this calling

5. World

- The final sphere of love is “global” - that we have a burden of love for Christ to be known and for the nations to be flourished as a result around the world
- ***Matthew 28:19 - Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,***
- So a question is how will JOAN be involved in global missions then?
 - **1. Praying**
 - **2. Giving**
 - **3. Sending short-term teams**
 - * Now this is a longer discussion, but I will say that I think short-term missions teams we do send - we want it to be as helpful for the host country and not a burden as possible
 - And so we will be very discerning in how we go about this
 - **4. Sending long-term missionaries**
 - * And something I love that the PCA's mission agency has talked about the 1% goal - where every PCA church has the goal of tithing 1% of their members to the mission field
 - * And we'd love to see that happen in our church - where 1% of our people will sense God's call and burden to go overseas to serve - whether as a tentmaker or vocational minister
 - And we want to be a faithful sending church to those that have that desire

Conclusion

- Let me end with two specific applications from this teaching...one as a church and one to think about personally
- **1. Application - JOAN Spheres of Love Updates on Sundays**

- But we rest in that Christ has done His work perfectly...and because of that...we know we are not condemned, but loved and accepted
- But let me end by sharing a final story to help us think about - well we're at the end of our discipleship pathway
 - ◉ We start with Gospel...to Grace, to Joy, to Righteousness - and it ends in Love - people so moved by Christ that we become like Christ...in these arenas of calling - family, church, work, society, and the world
 - ◉ So what are we praying will happen with this group of people at Joy of All Nations - as we leave these doors?
- Let me tell the story of Joe
 - ◉ Joe was a man who was homeless and a drunk
 - * And yet, he hears the Gospel and gets saved...life is changed
 - ◉ So, he starts serving the homeless shelter - serves food, washes up, cleans vomit
 - * And the people there really love him
 - ◉ So one day, at the worship service, a person comes up to pray – and starts praying, “God, make me like Joe, make me like Joe!”
 - * And the Preacher comes up saying, “I think it would be better if prayed, ‘Make me like Jesus’”?
 - The man says, “I don’t know Jesus...but is Jesus anything like Joe?”
- And that’s my prayer, that’s our prayer, right?
 - ◉ That we are sinners saved by grace...yet that grace is so mighty, so moving...that we can’t help but to serve others, love others
 - * And that love can be so powerful...that people might actually mistake us for Jesus
 - And if they ever do, like Joe, we simply then point them to Jesus...the one their hearts were truly made for
- Lets pray