

- ***READ Acts 2:42-47*** The New Testament clearly depicts Sunday, the first day of the week, as an important day on which disciples of Jesus are shown to have gathered for the purpose worshipping God together. **Acts 20:7** shows us the practice of disciples coming together to partake of the Lord's Supper and hear preaching on Sunday while in **1 Corinthians 16:2** we find Paul's instructions for disciples to use Sunday as the day when collections were to be taken up within the church.
- Of course, Sunday is such an pivotal day because it was the day on which Jesus was resurrected from the dead and shown to be the true Messiah of Israel. (**Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19**) This day is of the utmost importance to our faiths. It is the perfect way to begin a week, and there ought to be much spiritual good that takes place when God blesses us with the opportunity and ability to come together with His people for the purpose of worshipping Him for His great love towards us.
- However, I would like to suggest this morning that a disciple is to be a disciple on more days than just Sundays. Further, a disciple is not able to be nourished to the point of being able to grow strong in spirituality when he or she is focused on spiritual things only on the first day of the week. While what we do on Sunday is of the utmost importance because it gives us great encouragement and spiritual nourishment to start out our week... it cannot be the only time that we are spiritually focused or nourished throughout the week! It cannot be the only time that our faith is a priority. We must learn to be disciples that are giving attention to our faiths on the days between Sundays.
- This morning, we are going to have a bonus lesson on our 2019 focus of Excelling Still More by considering the need for daily growth in discipleship and 4 key points to embrace if we are going to be disciples who are not just surviving but thriving from Sunday to Sunday. We are going to begin in the text that we read together just a moment ago because it clearly shows us that the earliest disciples focused on their relationship with God and one another on many more days than just on Sundays.

4 Keys For Monday — Saturday Growth In Discipleship

I. Embrace discipleship as who we are and not only what we do.

- A. While discipleship clearly does involve what we now do in Christ as people who are His followers, I would strongly suggest that what we do in His name is more than only a Sunday event. Consider what we see in this **Acts 2:42-47** text. Luke first records that these new disciples were devoting themselves to spiritual endeavors and efforts through giving attention to the Apostles' teaching, fellowship with one another, breaking of bread (Lord's Supper based upon spiritual context), and prayer. They were a people that worshipped together in a collective manner. We might be able to assume based upon the pattern of worship in the New Testament that all of these things referred to what they did together on the Lord's Day. (**vv.42**)
- B. We see next that these disciples were involved with one another in their new lives as disciples of Jesus. Through their faith being further confirmed through what was being done through the Apostles, we quickly see a very strong bond of community established in that they held all of their positions in common. This meant that they were very willing and quick to share what they had with other disciples who were in need. (**vv.43-45**)
- C. Beyond that, we see it explicitly stated that these brethren were about their lives as disciples on a daily basis. **"Every day they devoted themselves..."** Whether in the temple or from house to house, these brethren were together and they were committed to growing their faith in Jesus and their fellowship with one another. For their efforts, we see that the Lord was blessing them with their number being grown day by day as more people came to faith in Jesus Christ. (**vv.46,47**)
- D. This type of devotion to their faiths shouldn't be something that surprises us if we are familiar with the teachings that Jesus delivered to the crowds who followed Him and wanted to know what it took to be His disciples. In **Luke 9:23,24**, Jesus is speaking with His Apostles just after Peter's confession of Him as the Christ, and our Lord teaches these men that anyone who comes to Him must be willing to come to Him on an "all in" basis. If anyone wanted to follow Him then he must be willing to lose himself in order to be found in Jesus. At least that is the nice way of saying it. The plain truth of Jesus's words is that those who want to be His disciples must be willing to die within themselves on a daily basis in order to follow Jesus wherever He might direct them. Their lives as themselves had to end, and a new life had to begin. This fits very well

with what we see Paul's mind in **Galatians 2:20** when he speaks of being crucified with Christ. We also see this idea spoken by Jesus and His other inspired writers throughout the New Testament, and it teaches us plainly that being a disciple is more than just what we do, but it is about who we become. When we come to Jesus, we are born of God into a new life, and we must embrace that new life. We are now new in Jesus!

1. *"Truly I tell you, unless someone is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3-7)*
2. *"Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in **newness of life**." (Romans 6:4)*
3. *"Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly, because **you have been born again**—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God." (I Peter 1:22,23)*
4. *"So now, little children, remain in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has **been born of Him**." (I John 2:28,29)*
5. *"Everyone who has been born of God does not sin (does not practice sin), because his seed remains in him; he is not able to sin (keep on sinning), because he has been **born of God**." (I John 3:9)*
6. *"Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been **born of God** and knows God." (I John 4:7)*
7. *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one **born of him**." (I John 5:1)*
8. *"...because everyone who has been **born of God** conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith." (I John 5:4)*
9. *"We know that everyone who has **been born of God** does not sin, but the one who is **born of God** keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." (I John 5:18)*

II. Recognize that we cannot draw closer to God without being in His Word.

- A. From Peter's writings we clearly see the importance of God's Word in our becoming of disciples through our new birth in Jesus, and I would further point out that God's Word continues to be that which helps us to grow as disciples. It is the word of God that teaches us, rebukes us, corrects us, and trains us. It is the Word of God alone that can make us into the complete disciples of Jesus who are able to go and do every good work that He expects for us to do. (II Timothy 3:16,17)
- B. Therefore, we would do well to adopt the mindset of the author of the **119th Psalm**. Particularly, we find in **verses 41-72** words of swelling admiration and trust that God's Word is what would help him to be exactly what God expected for Him to be. Here are a few excerpts from those verses that speak to the great benefit of being in God's Word.
 1. *"Never take the word of truth from my mouth, for I hope in Your judgments. I will always obey Your instruction, forever and ever." (Psalm 119:43,44)*
 2. *"Remember Your word to Your servant; You have given me hope through it. This is my comfort in my affliction: Your promise has given me life." (Psalm 119:49,50)*
 3. *"Your statutes are the theme of my song during my earthly life. Lord, I remember Your name in the night and I obey Your instruction. This is my practice: I obey Your precepts." (Psalm 119:54-56)*
 4. *"I thought about my ways and turned my steps back to Your decrees. I hurried, not hesitating to keep Your commandments." (Psalm 119:59,60)*
 5. *"Lord, You have treated Your servant well, just as You promised. Teach me good judgement and discernment, for I rely on Your commandments." (Psalm 119:65,66)*
 6. *"Instruction from Your lips is better for me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (Psalm 119:72)*

III. Understand the need for constant self-evaluation & self-improvement.

- A. There are numerous texts within the New Testament that emphasize our need to be a people who are constantly looking within ourselves to see what we can do to better ourselves as disciples and as people of godly character. Peter certainly speaks about this in **II Peter 1:3-13**.

1. Peter begins by reminding these of the fact that they were able to share in the divine nature of the Lord through the promises that had been handed down by Him. This opportunity demanded that they make every effort to supplement and grow their faiths with goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. **(vv.3-7)**
 2. If they were willing to strive for growth in these areas then they were assured of being fruitful in their service to Jesus, they would be confirming their calling and election, and they would gain entry into the eternal kingdom of Jesus. However, failure to do so would result in them being blind and shortsighted. **(vv.8-11)**
 3. With these truths being present, Peter was adamant that these brethren be constantly reminded of these things so that they would truly be making effort to make sure that this growth was evident in their lives. Even though they already knew this to be the case, Peter still insisted on reminding them of such things every chance he got. **(vv.12,13)**
- B. It is of the utmost importance that we are taking the time to evaluate our lives to measure whether or not we are remaining where we should be in Christ and, further, whether or not we are making strides in our discipleship. Paul admonished the Corinthians to take time to test themselves as to whether or not they were where they needed to be in the faith. **(II Corinthians 13:5)** Though he did this with a bit of snark coating these words because of the way they had been doubting his work as an Apostle, the principle remains present. If we are not taking time to evaluate ourselves then we are in danger of getting far off track without even realizing it, and this will only demand that we work that much harder to get back to where we need to be.
- C. And yet, it is better that we find out that we are lagging than to think that we are something when indeed we are nothing. If it is that we determine that we are not where we need or desire to be, then it might be that we are not where we need to be because we have not put in the time to prepare ourselves to be the type of disciples that we need to be. Consider this quote from a book I am currently reading entitled, *"Miracle Morning."*
- "Your level of success, will rarely exceed your level of personal development, because success is something you attract by the person you become."* (Miracle Morning, pg.10)
- D. This book is not a religious book by any means, but this principle is solid. While referring to our personal character development inviting success through our hard work and dedication, we must recognize how this principle applies to our lives as disciples. If we are desiring a high level of faith then we must prepare ourselves to achieve that level of faith by developing our character to be the type of character that God expects of His people. If we are not taking the time to develop those attributes of **II Peter 1** in our lives then why should we expect to achieve great feats of faith? Our level of success as disciples is going to be determined by the time and effort that we put into evaluating our faiths and developing them to be what God would have them to be. We have already seen that this comes from being daily in the Word of God, but we are extremely blessed not just with easy access to the Word, but also numerous other resources that can supplement our efforts.

IV. Take advantage of the numerous ways in which in we can take in & meditate upon God's Word and grow in our discipleship and character.

- A. While the Bible ought to be our permanent go-to for that which will help us to grow closer to God and in our faith/discipleship, we would be wasting excellent resources that are all around us in our day and age that can help us to take in even more spiritual nourishment that will help us to grow and thrive throughout the days between Sundays.

The ever present caveats always apply to those things that are not inspired of God. We would be wise to take anything that does not come straight from the pages of Scripture and give it the Acts 17:11 Berean test by checking any and everything against Scripture to make sure that it truly is good and appropriate for us in our efforts to grow as disciples. That being said, consider how the following can help supplement our efforts in taking in God's Word.

B. books other than the Bible

1. We have already concluded that the Bible is all sufficient to help us to know and be exactly what God desires for us to be. However, in suggesting that we take time to read books outside of the Bible, I am suggesting that we do so on the basis of those books opening our minds to a better and more full understanding of Scripture. Religious books can be a great aid in illuminating Scripture in ways that we might now have seen up to this point. Again, we need to make sure that we compare what we read to what is found in the Inspired Text, but taking time to read extra-Biblical books throughout the week can and will help us to gain daily spiritual nourishment.

2. Let me also say that even non-religious books can be quite beneficial to our growth as disciples. Self-help and character development books that are non-religious are often jammed packed with wise and beneficial principles that might seem revelatory, but what we eventually recognize is that those principles are first found in God's Word...we just might not have thought of them in the same terms as what we are reading in other books. These epiphanies are fun to experience and they can help excite us to grow in ways that might not have seem desirable or necessary.

C. videos & podcasts

1. While there are some difficulties that have been created by the advancements of technology, we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater by allowing the power of the internet to slip through our fingers. More than ever before, we have a near endless amount of resources at our disposal through the internet. This is true in many areas, religion and faith included. We would do well to take advantage of the times we live in by taking in as much spiritual nourishment through videos, audio lessons, and podcasts as we can.
2. One of the cool features that comes with our Congregate website is the ability to download lessons straight from the website to our phones or other podcasts players so that we might listen on the go. Any of the Congregate websites give you that ability. This is good to know because I'm sure that many of us have times throughout the day in the car, at the house, or on the job that allows opportunities to pass the time through listening to music or other things. Why not take some of those opportunities to listen to some spiritual teachings? Again, these could be actual worship assembly sermons or they could be other videos from other sources.
3. And yet, the medium which is probably the most popular at the moment is the podcast. I have spoken with some here in private discussions about some awesome podcasts that are absolutely free to listen to that do an excellent job of supplying high quality content that helps us to keep our minds focused on things above that can help us to be more spiritually minded. Two that I will plug simply because I know some of the people involved personally is *Excel Still More* by Kris Emerson and *Stop Being A Pew Potato* by Josh Hudson. I have a long list of other podcast thats I could recommend, and you're more than welcome to ask about those if you'd like. But sufficed to say at the moment that we could benefit greatly by sacrificing a few minutes every day to take in a bit more spiritually focused content through the use of podcasts.

D. community Bible studies

1. While listening to sermons and sitting in Bible classes give great opportunities for us to grow in knowledge and faith, some people find a smaller setting more conducive to their growth through Bible study. A smaller, less formal, and therefore less intimidating setting allows for a greater level of comfort for some people which in turn allows them to be more involved in discussing the Biblical text.
2. If you would consider yourself to be this type of person then know that there are opportunities for you all throughout the week to be involved with these smaller group type settings. There are two studies on Monday nights at different locations. I attend the men's study which is going through an overview of the Bible, and some ladies are meeting and I believe going through one of the Gospel accounts. There is also a morning study and a couple of other evening studies take place. If you want to be in God's Word throughout the week then please know that there are opportunities for you!

E. journalling

1. Finally, journalling can be a practice that can help disciples in their daily devotion and growth. While regular Bible reading and mediation is valuable in and of itself, some people might find it useful to write down different aspects of their studies, prayers, or daily activities as a means of having a visual representation of what is going on in their lives.
2. I have given journaling a try and while it is not yet something that I have fully embraced into my daily routine, it has proven to be quite encouraging to be able to look back over the past few days and see where my mind has been in regards to my faith. I have talked with others who have really done well with the journaling, and they have expressed similar sentiments. Maybe it can be something that helps you!

There is nearly no end to the many different ways that we can be a people of practicing and growing faith from Sunday to Sunday. It is my hope that these considerations this morning will only motivate you to embrace the need for daily discipleship and growth, and maybe given you a few ideas that can help you in your faith between Sundays.