Profile in Faith

Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899): Evangellist and Master Disciple Maker

by Lyle W. Dorsett
Beeson Divinity School

The reputation of Dwight L. Moody had been well established prior to his death in 1899. Although the famous evangelist was only sixty-two years old when he died, he had already preached the gospel to more than 100 million people. This energetic and widely admired preacher with seemingly unbounded passion to see souls come to faith held the distinction of having preached to more people than anyone in history.

Nothing in Dwight Moody’s early life suggested he would become internationally famous. On the contrary, this remarkable man, born into abject poverty in 1837 in rural Massachusetts, never secured more than four years of formal schooling. Forced to leave home at age ten and find work as a farm hand and living without benefit of a strong Christian upbringing, Moody became an anointed preacher whose name was known in most American households and in Great Britain. What few people know—even folk well informed about the history of Christianity in the English-speaking world—is that Dwight Moody was much more than an evangelist whose preaching led innumerable souls to Christ. Mr. Moody became one of the most effective disciple makers of church history.

Throughout his adult life, Moody emphasized “This one thing I do,” referring to God’s call on his life to work with souls. From his devotion to full-time ministry that began soon after his conversion at age nineteen, it is apparent that he was referring to a call that encompassed the healing and nurture of souls as well as evangelism. Moody always took the biblical view that the Great Commission calls us to make disciples not mere converts. Consequently he labored tirelessly to help people grow into strong, reproductive disciples, and he also labored to equip other men and women to become full-time workers in this broader disciple-making ministry.

Moody absolutely delighted in “the work,” as he dubbed his ministry. In one of his last letters, he referred to both the formal and nonformal educational programs he founded, which he believed were his most significant enterprises: “The work is sweeter now than ever, and I think I have some streams started that will flow on forever. What a joy to be in...” 

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In the legacy of C.S. Lewis, the Institute endeavors to develop disciples who can articulate, defend, and live faith in Christ through personal and public life.

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Kerry A. Knott
President, C.S. Lewis Institute

Dear Friends,

This is the third in a four-part series focusing specifically on discipleship. The first two volumes raised some challenging issues, and I hope you, personally, have been challenged as you seek to live out your faith and become more mature in Christ.

Continuing this deep dive into the topic of discipleship, Bill Kynes and Rob Norris help us understand in greater detail how grace, justification, sanctification and discipleship fit together. Each of these authors covers essential but often misunderstood doctrines with profound insight for our daily lives and the life of the church. Regis Nicoll assesses our current situation in the church and gives a clear call to intentionality in discipleship.

We have two exemplary profiles: D. L. Moody, best known as a world-changing evangelist who was also an intentional and effective discipler; and recently deceased Roy Cook worked behind the scenes to make an enormous impact on national and international leaders through his discipling commitments. As you read these powerful but very different examples, think about what God may be calling you to do in discipling others.

Tom Tarrants’ article, “Following Jesus Christ,” provides helpful and challenging insights on what it really means to follow Jesus Christ in daily life. Several of us have been encouraging Tom to write a book on discipleship and to update his testimony. I’m glad to report that as he approaches his 65th birthday, he is now feeling a greater urgency to do both. Toward that end, Tom will be splitting his time between the Institute and writing as of September 1.

In God’s perfect timing, Joel Woodruff, one of our Teaching Fellows, will be joining our staff as director of discipleship and outreach to help us continue to roll out our discipleship resources and expand our programs to new cities.

Please pray for Tom and Joel as they begin these new assignments, and please continue to pray that all of us at the Institute will be faithful followers of Christ in all that we do.

Sincerely,

Kerry A. Knott
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Getting Intentional About Discipleship

by Regis Nicoll

Knowing & Doing • Page 3

Jesus was intentional about discipleship. For three years he invested himself in the lives of twelve men who would eventually take up the work he had begun. He gave them a call (to follow me), a command (to love as I have loved), and a commission (to make disciples).

From the Sermon on the Mount to the Emmaus Road, they received instruction, object lessons, and discipline to prepare them for their disciple-making work. Eleven completed the program and, after Pentecost, began preaching the gospel, living the revolutionary way of life they had learned from their Lord.

The rapid growth of their numbers and the peculiar quality of their community captured the attention of skeptics and curiosity-seekers alike. In an early second century letter to “Diognetus”—a well-placed pagan desiring to learn about the Christian faith—the author shares: “Christians are distinguished from other men... [by] their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.” The author goes on to describe, at some length, the attitudes and behaviors of a community that exhibited a moral standard that was odd and unfamiliar, yet winsome.

Fast-forward nearly nineteen hundred years.

Sixteen Percent

In 2007 George Barna found that born-again Christians were “statistically indistinguishable” from their non-Christian neighbors in 15 moral behaviors (including lying, gossiping, substance abuse and extra-marital sex). Two years later, Barna observed that 66 percent of American adults are what he terms, “Casual Christians.”

Casuals are self-identified Christians who “do not view matters of faith as central to one’s purpose or success in life.” Casuals want a low-demand faith, one that helps them feel religious and be better people, without having to take a stand on moral issues. Barna calls it “faith in moderation.” I think “lukewarm” was how Jesus put it.

By contrast, “Captive Christians” are believers whose lives “are defined by their faith.” They have high commitment in “serving Christ and carrying out His commands and principles.” As Dietrich Bonhoeffer would say, theirs is a faith of costly grace established on the Cross of salvation and the Yoke of discipleship. Sadly, Barna reports that Captives comprise only 16 percent of adults. Sixteen percent!

The United States is the most Christianized nation on the planet in terms of per capita churches, clergy, religious education, and educational resources. It has the most Christians—nearly twice as many as the next highest country, Brazil—and yet, only 16 percent could be considered followers of Jesus Christ.

Are we surprised, then, that there is little difference in the moral behaviors of Christians and non-Christians? Are we shocked when yet another denomination adopts heterodox theology or endorses unbiblical practices? Are we stunned that mainline churches are in decline and that youth are heading for the exits at record levels? Are we dismayed that the Church has lost its moral voice in an increasingly secular culture? If we are, we shouldn’t be.

Course Correction

As lamentable as these things are, they are the predictable fruits of decades and generations of non-discipleship Christianity. Although job one of the Church is (and always has been) to make

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One of the great challenges for all Christians is to hold the balance between mind and heart, between doctrine and experience. If the doctrine is wrong, then the whole practice of our Christian faith will become distorted, and our Christian lives will be the poorer. Yet in our generation many Christians often say that they are looking for what they think is “practical” help in their living of the Christian life. When they hear of a “doctrine,” they become convinced that it belongs to the realm of the mind and dismiss it as having little or no practical value and consequently neglect or even avoid it. One of those doctrines frequently thought of in this way is sanctification. Yet sanctification is the biblical way of describing Christian discipleship, and unless we understand it in its full expression as the Scripture unfolds it, we risk reducing discipleship to a series of “do’s and don’ts” that all too often results in a rigid and arid legalism.

As is the case with many of the doctrines taught in Scripture, there exists a wide theological diversity in the Christian community on the understanding of what sanctification means. However, there is a general agreement about the absolute importance for every Christian to live out his or her faith in the midst of a world where Christ is not received or welcomed. This involves being faithful to him to see him as the only way to heaven and to live in witness to his uniqueness as Savior and the absolute Lord. This is how the Scripture understands sanctification in the life of the believer.

The Greek verb for sanctification, hagiazō, means to be “set apart,” and it always indicates the sovereign action of God who “sets apart” a person, place, or a thing in order to accomplish his purposes. When we become Christians by the call of God, every believer is thus set apart by God. The great privilege we have is that as distinct from our justification—where we are declared righteous by God on the basis of the finished work of Christ, and to which we contribute nothing—in our sanctification we bring our redeemed minds, hearts, and wills to cooperate with the Holy Spirit who indwells us, in living out our lives as Christians. This is what is meant by discipleship, which is a work of God in us. This is distinct from our justification in which God sovereignly declares us righteous, as the apostle Paul makes clear when writing to the Romans: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (8:33).

While justification is declarative, sanctification is concerned to eliminate sin from our lives and conform us to the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a lifelong process in which the Holy Spirit, who indwells us and causes us to persevere in the struggle with sin until Christ returns or calls us, “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,” (Phil.3.21) so that we are delivered from that which is corruptible, and we put on bodies no longer subject to decay, death, or sin.

The Scripture makes clear that in one sense our sanctification is something already accomplished for us by the completed work of Christ on the cross as was made clear by the author of Hebrews, who wrote, “For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (10:14). As our substitute, the death of Christ has satisfied the justice of God, which demanded that “the soul that sins shall die.” By his resurrection Jesus has demonstrated...
that death, which is the judgment of God on sin, is conquered and, as a consequence, the bondage of the believer to sin is broken. As a result of the salvation accomplished for us, we are set free to live the life God desires for us.

John Webster, professor of systematic theology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, in his little book titled *Holiness*, summarizes sanctification in a carefully constructed and succinct way:

*The sanctification of the Christian is the work of the Holy Trinity in which the reconciled sinner is renewed for the active life of holy fellowship with God. Grounded in the electing, reconciling and perfecting work of Father, Son and Spirit the active life of holy fellowship is the work of faith, which is at every moment characterized by mortification and vivification, and which is actual as freedom, obedience, and love.*

He clearly articulates the biblical teaching that sanctification has its origin in the decree of God that was made before all events relating to creating beings, so that God knew certain people as his own, having predestined them to be sanctified and thus conformed to the image of his Son. Christ himself, by his sinless life of obedience to the law of God and his perfect death as a sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of his people, has made that purposeful conformity possible for fallen sinners. His work is then applied when by the ministry of the Holy Spirit that work of the Son is applied when the sinner is justified and the new life is breathed into the dead soul, which then displays itself and grows until there is a final glorification at the resurrection of the dead.

Sanctification is seen thereby to be a continuous and lifelong process that is a work of the Triune God. The Father has decreed the sanctification of his people, and the Spirit accomplishes that work as Paul makes clear: “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

The Spirit applies the work of the Son “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).

While the work of Christ in the past guarantees our standing as children of God by God’s grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, who applies the work of Christ and indwells the believer, continues to aid us in the present. Sanctification is both present and progressive. All through our life as children of God, we will still battle the reality of living in a sinful world facing the temptations that the world offers to bodies that are still subject to earthly desires, so that even though we have been “set apart” as God’s children, we continue to behave in ways that are contrary to our new status of being children of God. At the same time, precisely because we are now children of God there is an inner conflict that is experienced by Christians when we sin. The war that rages inside of Christians is the battle between our old self and our new self and is described by the apostle Paul when he wrote to the Galatians,

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, (continued on page 23)
Discipleship or Grace: Must It Be One or the Other?

by Bill Kynes
Pastor, Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church, Annandale, VA

Christians can quite easily become subject to a kind of spiritual schizophrenia. On the one hand, we are told that the gospel is a message of grace. God sent his Son into the world to die for our sin so that we might be forgiven. In response we must renounce all efforts at self-justification and put our faith solely in Jesus Christ as our Savior, resting completely in what he has done for us in his finished work on the cross. We are justified by grace alone through faith alone.

But what are we to make of Jesus’ demanding call to discipleship in which we are to give up all that we have and take up our cross and follow him as our Lord? Doesn’t the Christian life entail discipline and a strive to do our duty before God? Aren’t we to run the race set before us, straining for what is ahead, seeking the prize (Heb. 12:1; 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:13–14)? Aren’t we to learn to obey all that Jesus taught us (Matt. 28:20)? Aren’t we morally obliged to seek holiness?

So which is it? How does this call to costly and obedient discipleship relate to the offer of free grace received by faith alone?

Some seek to resolve this tension by completely separating the two temporally and theologically. We first believe the gospel and are justified; then we respond to Christ’s call to discipleship and by our own efforts seek to be sanctified. We are first forgiven by faith, and then we are made holy by our own works.

In practice, this bifurcation often means that the second stage in this two-stage process is considered optional, resulting in the category known as “carnal Christians”—those who are justified but not sanctified, believers without obedience. This distortion of the gospel has been rightly labeled “cheap grace.” For others, who put all their stress on the rigors of following Jesus, the Christian life becomes spiritually dysfunctional and deadening, resulting in a frustrating return to the works of the law as the means to please God.

As in marriage, so in theology, much confusion results when we separate what God has joined together. In this article I hope to show that the gracious invitation of the gospel and the costly call to discipleship are not in contradiction but in sublime harmony when certain misperceptions are swept away. To hold these two together we must rightly understand the full scope of the gospel, the proper nature of saving faith, the profound work of the Holy Spirit, and finally the essential foundation of our Christian identity: our union with Christ.

The Full Scope of the Gospel

Part of the confusion Christians experience comes through failing to appreciate all that God promises in the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, but that salvation doesn’t end with the forgiveness of our sins. God’s saving purpose extends to the restoration of our fallen nature and our conformity to the image of Christ who is the image of God (Rom. 8:29). Nothing less will do.

The gospel is a work of God’s grace from first to last, and it promises us a full salvation—not from the penalty of our sin only, but also from its power in our lives, and ultimately even from its presence in the world. Consequently our justification can-
not be separated from our sanctification or from our final glorification with Christ (Rom. 8:30). They are all of a piece, aspects of the one saving gospel. Jesus’ call to follow him into a new life of faithful love and obedience to our heavenly Father fits into that broad scope, for it is itself part of God’s gracious work in our lives to redeem us and restore us and to present us to himself as a beautiful and radiant Bride.

I appreciate the words of the nineteenth-century Anglican bishop J. C. Ryle on this theme:

He who supposes that Jesus Christ only lived and died and rose again in order to provide justification and forgiveness of sins for His people, has yet much to learn. Whether he knows it or not, he is dishonouring our blessed Lord, and making Him only a half Saviour. The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people’s souls require not only to deliver them from the guilt of their sins by His atoning death, but from the dominion of their sin, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit; not only to justify them, but also to sanctify them.

Our gracious God not only saves us from our sin, he also saves us for God’s glory by remaking us in the image of his Son Jesus Christ. We must understand Christ’s call to discipleship as an integral part of the full scope of God’s gospel in our lives.

The Proper Nature of Saving Faith

A second misconception that sometimes perplexes believers arises from an inadequate conception of the nature of saving faith. Some think of faith as a mere intellectual assent to a bare theological proposition: Jesus died for my sins. But this oversimplification removes faith from its personal and moral context, which is central to the gospel.

Yes, biblical faith involves specific content. This first aspect of faith is what the Reformers called in Latin notitita. It consists of the notions, the ideas, the conceptions that are to be believed. The early Christians sometimes called this “the faith”—the doctrines taught in the Bible about God and man and the revelation of God in a man, Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of the content of our faith in a passage like 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 (cf. also, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:9; 4:6; Titus 1:13). In this sense faith involves knowledge; we must know who Christ is and what he has done before we can believe in him. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

And yes, we must affirm the truth of that biblical message. This second aspect of faith is what the Reformers called assensus. We must not only understand the message, we must assent to it. To believe, in a biblical sense, we must come to a conviction about

Most will acknowledge the central role of the Holy Spirit in conversion. Only by the convicting and regenerating work of the Spirit is saving faith even possible. Our faith is itself a gift of God. Sadly, however, many restrict the Spirit’s work to this initial entry point of the Christian life and assume that they are on their own from that point.
As Jesus traveled throughout Israel urging people to repent and believe the gospel, “Follow me” was a constant refrain in his message. At the beginning of his ministry, he called his first disciples with the terse command, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” As his ministry progressed, he told the crowds, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). At the end of his earthly ministry, he recommissioned the repentant Peter with the words, “Follow me” (John 21:19).

Have you ever probed the meaning of this phrase? If not, you should, because it can lead to a profound, transforming change in how you think about and live the Christian life. Perhaps this article can help get you started.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Following Jesus begins when we respond to his call to repent and believe the gospel. The Good News that God loves us and has taken the initiative to reconcile us to himself by giving his Son to atone for our sins awakens us to God’s grace and moves us to want to live for Christ and follow him.

When we turn our attention to what the Bible shows us about how to actually follow Jesus in daily life, two things stand out immediately: understanding and obeying his teaching and following his example. Let’s take them in turn.

For his first disciples, hearing and obeying Jesus’ teachings were fundamental to following him. This is evident in the fact that soon after calling them, Jesus gave his disciples the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), an extensive in-depth teaching on life in the kingdom of God - what we might call basic principles of discipleship or the Christian life. At the conclusion of this sermon, Jesus emphasized with striking clarity the profound importance of hearing and obeying this teaching:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:24–27).

The point Jesus is making in these words is that building one’s life on obedience to his teaching is wise and will sustain his disciples in the challenges they will inevitably encounter in life, just as building one’s house on a foundation of rock will secure it against the forces of nature that will assault it. Disobedience to his Word is folly and leads to ruin, as surely as building a house on sand will result in utter catastrophe when those same storms come. If we want to follow Jesus, then, we will certainly want to begin where the first disciples did, with understanding and obeying the foundational teaching in this sermon. And from there we will go on to study his teaching elsewhere in the Gospels.

Following Jesus also involves following his example. In the Upper Room, after washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus said, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have
washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet, For I have given you an example, that you should also do just as I have done to you” (John 13:14–15). The lesson Jesus was teaching is the importance of serving one another in humility of heart and of becoming servant leaders. This was a critically important lesson they had been slow to learn and washing their feet was an extraordinarily effective way of making the point. Sometimes, seeing a concrete example makes a greater impact on people than yet another statement of principle. This is but one instance of his example we are to imitate. A careful reading of the Gospels will reveal others.

It could rightly be asked, what is the value of simply following an example? Can’t that lead to a kind of external, works-orientated mentality? It can, if we are doing nothing more than external imitation. The key is our motive. If we are earnestly seeking to please Jesus out of love, it can awaken a new understanding and deeper appreciation of the act we are performing. We all know that our thoughts can lead us into taking action, and our feelings can lead into action as well. But we often don’t realize that our actions can lead us into a different way of thinking or feeling. Consider, for example, the suburbanite who volunteers in an inner-city soup kitchen out of a sense of duty or maybe guilt. Through the experience of getting to know the poor and their problems, a deep and genuine compassion can emerge that changes the volunteer’s motive for serving and transforms that person into a true servant of the poor. So it is with following the example of Jesus. It can change us inwardly and help us become in our hearts what we are doing with our hands.

Following Jesus, then, entails both obeying his teachings and imitating his example. But this is not the sum of the matter. For obeying and imitating are not ends in themselves but are means to a greater end. That end or goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus himself: to think as he thought, to feel as he felt, to act as he acted, desire what he desired. As John puts it, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6). Because Jesus is the image of God in human form (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1: 3), as we become more and more like him, the image of God is increasingly restored in our lives.

A key part of this process is gaining a clearer knowledge of Jesus as he is presented to us in Scripture. And a time-honored way of doing this is to consistently and prayerfully read the Gospels and reflect on the life and teaching of Jesus. As we immerse our minds and hearts in the gospels, two major defining characteristics of his life stand out with striking clarity: faith and love. Secure in the love of God and his own sonship, Jesus lived with an unshakable trust in his heavenly Father and wholehearted love for God and others. If we want to become like Jesus, faith and love must become defining characteristics of our lives, too.

Let’s turn now to a brief look at faith in the life of Jesus. The picture of Jesus that emerges in the Gospels is of a man who lived his daily life in conscious, trusting dependence on his Father in heaven. Consider, for example, how his resistance to the Devil’s temptations in the wilderness reveals an unshakable faith in God and his Word (Matt. 4:1–11). Or his dependence on the Father in the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:40–43). Or his confidence that his Father would raise him from the grave (Mark 8:31). In each instance, Jesus has absolute trust in his Father. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than when he agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane, (continued on page 29)
Discipleship Any Follower of Jesus Can Do: 
The Legacy of Roy Cook

by Jim Hiskey
Co-founder, C.S. Lewis Institute

Have you heard of Roy Cook? Not many people have. He was a shy person, introspective and withdrawn. At his funeral earlier this year, his best friend said his schoolmates thought he was a nerd. He was often rejected. Once while a teen he thought about strapping himself with bombs and blowing himself up at the school.

It has been my pleasure to be mentored by and to walk with some influential spiritual leaders, including Dick Halverson, Carl F. H. Henry, Jim Houston, Bill Bright, and Charles Malik, all of whom have impacted the nation’s capital in some way.

But I know of no one who has had a more far-reaching ministry of discipleship than Roy Cook. Nor unnoticed.

And, how he did it, can be emulated by any child of God.

St. Paul was Roy’s model. After Paul had been with new believers in Thessalonica, he wrote them a letter. He applauded these brothers and sisters for being models of Jesus. He reminded them that he and his companions Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy had wanted to be examples for them. “We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children,” he wrote. “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thess. 2:7–8 NIV).

Note our lives as well. This verse became Roy Cook’s DNA.

“Roy Cook gave his life for me,” Doug Coe said as he spoke at Roy’s funeral. “He could have become a concert pianist. He was good enough, but he gave it up.

“My mother connived a way to get Roy and me together,” Doug said. “When Roy went off to college in Minnesota, she arranged for us to be roommates. When I quit school and came back to Oregon to marry Jan, Roy quit too.

“When I decided to go back to college at Willamette University in Oregon,” Doug said, “Roy was in a couple of my classes. He’d followed me.”

Doug had throngs of friends at Willamette, but no one was attracted to Roy. Doug liked Roy, because Roy was older and had been a merchant marine. “I liked to hear Roy tell stories,” Doug said.

Loda Coe, Doug’s mother, introduced Roy to Jesus. Dawson Trotman and his friends with the Navigators helped him get his start with a daily practice of time in the Scriptures, prayer, and Scripture memory. He began to read the Bible systematically, book by book, and memorize three verses a week. He continued this discipline all his life, and at one time had cataloged about four thousand verses that he had memorized.

Yet hardly anyone knew of his knowledge of the Word. He never drew attention to himself.

Roy was funny.

A small group of young men in Arlington, Virginia, where Roy lived, asked him to help disciple them. The group met regularly and grew. Some of the men later moved from Arlington to other places in the United States.

But the group wanted to keep meeting, so one year they met on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. About one hundred young men showed up. Kevin Konkal was one of...
the men. At Roy’s memorial service, Kevin spoke about this gathering.

“During the weekend Roy charged us to see what was happening in the kingdom of God.” Kevin said, “He used the story of Balaam in Numbers 22 to help us understand his point.”

After Roy read the story, Kevin explained that Roy wanted them to see why the donkey had stopped and Balaam had tried to push forward. “It was because the donkey saw the kingdom of God,’ Roy said. ‘Balaam didn’t . . . I want to be like Balaam’s ass.’

“Our whole group said in unison, ‘So do we!’” Kevin said.

From that point on, the men, who spend one weekend a year together, have called themselves the Balaam’s Ass Group.

Roy Cook’s greatest legacy will be lives of men and some women he mentored. The first man he worked with was Doug Coe. He continued as Doug’s mentor for sixty-eight years.

I have been a partner with these two men and a few others for nearly fifty of these years. Dick Halverson, former chaplain of the US Senate, was also our partner and a mentor to us. He often reminded us that we were to be salt in the earth. “If we do our job well,” he said, “no one will know it.”

Both Roy and Doug have personified this truth. Though Doug has been responsible for much of the leadership behind the scenes at the National Prayer Breakfast, not once in the past fifty years has he stood on the platform. Roy was less visible. More than five decades ago, Doug was invited to sit in on a breakfast with members of the US Senate. He’s been a regular attendee since, but, he has spoken but once. Doug has told me that most people perceive the work he does is to be with national leaders. But looking back on his life, he says that his time with national and world leaders has taken up “less than 5 percent of my time.” Though making disciples like Jesus has always been the main thrust for both Roy and Doug, the bulk of Doug’s time today is devoted to working with the poor.

Doug and I have been friends and partners in God’s work for forty-nine years. We’ve played lots of golf together and shared a lifetime of heartbreaks and joys. One of the greatest privileges of my life was being asked by Doug to help disciple his son, Jonathan. Then, after Jonathan died of cancer at age twenty-seven, having the privilege of presiding at his memorial service.

Michael Lindsey, author and Rice University sociologist, said the work Doug Coe and his predecessors Abraham Vereide and Dick Halverson have done is, “The most significant spiritual force especially in the lives of leaders in Washington, DC, of any entity I know of. They have sustained more influence over decades than any other entity. There is nothing comparable to them.”

Lindsey’s statements and others like them humor me.

We often call ourselves “western rejects” because Abraham Vereide, Dick Halverson, Doug, and most of us have come from the western states.

Doug likens us to David’s early army of men who were “distressed, discontent, and in debt.” No one, except for Dick Halverson, seemed to be much of a leader. If God has used our little group, it’s because he has a good sense of humor.

That’s not to say Doug has not had influence. He is a man of vision, and doors have continually opened for him with untold leaders all over the world.

It’s been enjoyable to watch Doug and Roy’s relationship deepen and expand. Doug’s focus in his early days in Washington was twofold: students and national leaders, students being more his passion. The C. S. Lewis Institute grew out of this student work. Prison Fellowship was another outgrowth. Congressman and Ambassador Tony Hall’s work in world hunger was another outgrowth.

Doug’s focus changed after he visited Assisi and became an admirer (continued on page 33)
Evangelist and Master Disciple Maker

(continued from page 1)

the harvest field and have a hand in God’s work.” Just a few months before his death, Moody told his oldest son that his efforts to train the upcoming generation of young people “are the best pieces of work I have ever done.”

Conversion

Dwight Moody’s life in Christ began when he left the hardscrabble soil of northwestern Massachusetts. Leaving behind his grinding labor as a farm hand, the restless teen moved to Boston, where he found employment in an uncle’s shoe store. Moody’s godly relative provided room, board, and a day job to his seventeen-year-old nephew with one condition: he must faithfully promise to attend Sunday school and church every week.

Young Moody kept his promise, and Uncle Lemuel Holton witnessed the answer to his prayers. Dwight heard the gospel story from his Sunday school teacher, Edward Kimball, who one Saturday stopped by Holton’s shoe store where he found Dwight alone. Moody never forgot the day Kimball came behind the counter “and put his hand upon my shoulder, and talked to me about Christ and my soul. I had not felt I had a soul till then.” Moody stood astounded by the presence of this man who had known him only a few weeks yet wept over his sins. Years later Moody said, “I don’t remember what he said, but I can feel the power of that man’s hand on my shoulder tonight.” Within a few months, the young shoe store clerk surrendered his life to Christ and expressed a willingness to repent and be mentored in the faith by Edward Kimball and a few other men in Boston’s Mount Vernon Congregational Church. The young convert admitted that he soon found himself in “a conflict with my will. I had a terrible battle to surrender my will, and to take God’s will.”

An Impetuous Move

Late in life D. L. Moody told his oldest son, William, that he had “always been a man of impulse. Almost everything I ever did in my life that was a success was done on impulse.” Leaving the family and moving to Boston in 1854 was impulsive. And so was the decision in autumn 1856 to leave Boston and travel a thousand miles west to Chicago—a fast-growing little city on Lake Michigan. The Windy City did not exist until 1830, but by the time of Moody’s arrival the population had reached 84,000. Four years later the rapidly growing gateway city to the West had burgeoned to 112,000.

Moody moved to the booming Midwestern metropolis on impulse but God had clearly gone before him to open the way. The impetuous New Englander expressed an ambition to acquire assets of $100,000—a fortune by any standard in an era when most working men earned no more than a dollar a day. Soon after his arrival, the determined New Englander began to prosper by selling boots and shoes and investing his profits in Chicago’s lucrative real estate market. Before Illinois’ favorite son Abraham Lincoln was elected in 1860, Moody
boasted he was debt free, had saved more than $12,000, and continued to watch his income grow higher with every passing month.

Despite his ambition to earn money, Moody purposively pursued his walk with the Lord. Soon after his arrival in Chicago, he began rooming and taking meals in the house of “Mother” H. Phillips. Mrs. Phillips not only housed and fed Moody, she held him accountable to pray and read his Bible daily and attend services at First Baptist, her home church. But Mother Phillips did more than mentor Moody; she encouraged him to assist her in city mission work. Thanks to the witness of this godly woman, Moody began an outreach to a growing throng of street children—thousands of impoverished boys and girls who roamed the streets and alleys of the neighborhoods where the lowest social and economic classes lived.

Foundational Experiences

If Dwight L. Moody began to realize his ambition to make money, he did not forget his own childhood of poverty and the needs of his mother and siblings. Indeed, he regularly sent money to his mother, enabling her to own and maintain the family house in Northfield and provide for her needs and those of his younger siblings.

In late 1856 and well into 1857, a religious revival broke out in Chicago. Moody and many other business men found themselves going to prayer meetings at lunchtime and worship services most evenings.

During his open-air evangelistic outreaches along the lakefront, Moody met J. B. Stillson, a man at least twice his age who served as a spiritual father. He taught his young disciple how to study the Bible. He also introduced him to study aids such as a concordance and Bible dictionary. Stillson not only taught Moody how to get riches from the Bible in more systematic and contextual ways, he introduced his young protégé to George Müller’s A Life of Trust. This book, plus the ever-growing nuggets he began to glean from Scripture, helped the spiritually alert young man discern a gift of faith and a growing calling to the rescue and care of souls.

As a result of seeking a closer walk with the Lord, the twenty-two-year-old lad from Massachusetts grew increasingly restless. While continuing to buy and sell city lots on speculation, as well as marketing boots and shoes, Moody discovered more fulfillment in child evangelism and late-night witnessing to sailors and laboring men who lived, worked, and drank to excess along the docks of Lake Michigan.

At the onset of the Civil War in April 1861, Moody was increasing his commitment to evangelistic work among Chicago’s poorest street children—herding them into a one-time saloon he turned into a mission school and recruiting volunteers to help tame and teach the destitute children whom no one, not even the committed Christians in the mainline churches, knew how to reach.
Evangelist and Master Disciple Maker

It became apparent to everyone who knew Moody that he had been blessed with a sacred anointing. His ability to rescue children, introduce them to Jesus Christ, and help them to form Christ-honoring lives was phenomenal. It likewise grew evident that Moody had a unique ability to find facilities to house a mission school for boys and another for girls. He also did more than find buildings; like a magnet he attracted a following of businessmen who eagerly dug into their pockets for money to purchase property and support “the work.” Additionally, Moody attracted young women and men to help nurture and teach the children. Among them was Emma Revell who would eventually become Dwight’s wife and the love of his life. In brief, Moody became an American George Müller.

As Moody imbibed deep drafts of Scripture and spent increasing time in prayer and ministry, he gradually turned from business to full-time ministry. Worldlings called Moody “crazy,” because he gave up his lucrative real estate and business ventures to “waste time” on dirty and rowdy children. But for Mr. Moody, going into full-time Christian service was neither insane nor impulsive. On the contrary, he gradually and prayerfully followed the Lord’s guidance one step at a time. When acquaintances chided, “What are you doing now, Moody?” his joyful response remained the same: “I am working for Jesus Christ.”

Wartime Ministries

By the time of his twenty-fourth birthday in 1861, Moody was listed in the Chicago city directory as “city missionary.” This generic label was quite appropriate. Moody worked without pay as an evangelist for Chicago’s Young Men’s Christian Association. To conserve money for ministry, he lived in the modest YMCA building, sleeping on a line of chairs that he covered with old newspapers for a mattress. Eventually a group of devout Christian businessmen, among them John V. Farwell, a dry-goods merchant who became one of the wealthiest men in the booming Illinois metropolis, discovered Moody’s living arrangements. They immediately agreed to provide monthly stipends to Moody so he at least would have a comfortable place to live and a diet of more than cheese and crackers.

A watershed in Moody’s life and ministry occurred in 1862. He and Emma Revell married and began a beautiful marriage that produced three children. That same year Moody, under the covering of the YMCA and the Illinois Christian Commission, became a chaplain to General U. S. Grant’s soldiers.

While four years of fratricide raged, Moody ministered to Union soldiers in Grant’s army. In the winter months, during lulls in fighting, he conducted evangelistic services and Bible classes for

The world has yet to see what God will do through a man fully consecrated to him.  

(British Evangelist Henry Varley to D.L. Moody)
large gatherings of soldiers. He also visited Confederate troops in prison camps—happily sharing the good news and food from the Bible to the soldiers in gray. At times of heavy combat, Chaplain Moody was usually found in field hospitals, where he would engage in one-on-one personal work. In these tents and make-shift field hospital buildings, Moody would go from man to man, listening to their confessions, praying for them, and helping them send letters to loved ones—regardless of the color of their uniform.

Postwar Work

The personal work became a school of practical ministry for the poorly educated evangelist. There he learned to listen to God as he listened to broken men. While he never ceased to believe in the importance of preaching to large crowds, Moody came to understand the supreme importance of personal ministry. In the same way that Edward Kimball had laid his hand on young Moody’s shoulder and then prayed for the healing and salvation of his soul—so Dwight Moody discovered the power of placing his hand on the forehead, arm, or hand of wounded and dying men as he prayed for their peace, comfort, and salvation.

By the war’s end in 1865, Moody knew that preaching, teaching, and personal ministry comprised his life’s work. He also met and began to mentor men who knew even less about ministry than did he. During those tumultuous years, Moody trained men and women to evangelize and disciple children in the poorest sections of Chicago. And he helped equip men and women to join him in doing evangelistic and disciple-making work among adults.

Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, the YMCA maintained a decidedly evangelistic focus. The association’s work-ers were called to evangelize the unsaved and make disciples who could reproduce their kind among the converts. Moody took a lead in preaching, teaching, and fundraising under the auspices of the YMCA. And he also planted a church in the heart of Chicago, where the poorest of the city’s poor would attend and be comfortable alongside people of more means.

Moody’s ministry grew so rapidly after the Civil War that out of necessity he was led to train people as helpers who were equally committed to Christ and his kingdom. Among those Union combatants he met during the war, Major D. W. Whittle became one of his closest and dearest friends.

Moody became an encourager of Whittle soon after the young officer was severely wounded at Vicksburg in 1863. And after the war, when Whittle returned to Chicago and became an executive with the Elgin Watch Company, Moody drafted him to help out with Bible studies for new believers. Moody also encouraged Major Whittle to accept some speaking and preaching engagements. Then in 1873 Whittle learned what his mentor and friend had learned over a decade earlier: if God taps you on the shoulder to enter full-time ministry, you find no peace until you obey.

Soon after D. W. Whittle answered the call to a life of preaching and disciple making, he in turn mentored Paul P. Bliss who taught music in Chicago. Moody had urged Bliss to become a music evangelist, and Whittle walked alongside the able vocalist and song writer. By 1874 Bliss teamed up with Whittle and the twosome of Whittle and Bliss became an anointed and popular evangelistic team in the same vein as D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey, who traveled throughout the United States and Great Britain preaching and singing the gospel.
Evangelist and Master Disciple Maker

A Multifaceted Ministry

By 1870 Dwight L. Moody and his song leader Ira Sankey spent at least half of their time holding evangelistic crusades. Eventually Moody would preach the gospel and Sankey would sing the Good News to more than 100 million people. There is no way to quantify the effect of this ministry. Sufficient to say, tens of thousands became believers or recommitted their lives to Jesus Christ and found healing and freedom from various bondages.

Because of his experiences with Edward Kimball and his field hospital ministry during the Civil War, Moody knew he must find ways for the crowds who heard him preach to get individual care. Out of the necessity to help the seekers at his meetings in America and abroad, Mr. Moody sought the help of local churches wherever he preached. Before his big preaching crusades that typically lasted from one to six weeks, he sought the assistance of local pastors and lay leaders in identifying people he could train for “inquiry room” consultations. Moody believed that at the end of his sermons people should not be pressured to come forward and “accept Christ.” Instead, he invited people to visit “inquiry rooms” after the message. There they could ask questions about the message, the Bible, or issues involving their souls. In those unhurried environments, men, women, and children were not only encouraged to ask questions, they were invited to seek prayer for salvation, inner or physical healing, or sundry needs and burdens. And finally, to be sure, folks were encouraged to attend local churches for baptism and membership.

In the wake of such meetings, thousands not only heard the gospel and made a decision to turn to Christ; a maturation process bolstered by face-to-face counsel, encouragement to read Scripture and pray, as well as invitations to become connected to Bible-teaching, Christ-honoring churches where wholesome fellowship could be found became the order of the day.

Besides these impetuses for converts and new Christians to grow, countless men and women experienced God’s call to Christian service. Indeed, Moody and his fellow workers were frequently asked for advice about entering full-time service, and the requests to be mentored and trained for Christian ministry became so common that Moody knew he could not ignore them.

When those who sought guidance toward ministry were university educated and economically stable—like Henry Drummond and R. A. Torrey—Moody’s task was simple. They were invited to travel with the team and be mentored for ministry along the way. In fact, Moody was able to help both of these men build upon and apply their extensive educations and point them to places where they almost immediately could become useful in “the work.” But many men and women who came to Moody for help came from backgrounds similar to his. They grew up in rural or urban poverty, and they had little or no education beyond the elementary levels of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Moody’s heart went out to such people and consequently “the work” took on new and formal dimensions. In his home base, Chicago, Mr. Moody managed to recruit a college professor from Illinois State Normal University, Emma Dryer, to oversee a training school for women who felt called to foreign or home missions. They had committed their lives to Christ and his kingdom at one of Moody’s meetings and soon thereafter felt called to foreign or home missions.

already by 1879 a local historian called it “Mr. Moody’s Theological Seminary.” Of course it was hardly sophisticated enough for that lofty title, but within a few years the Chicago Bible
Training School for women opened its doors to men. Gradually a small work for women became the Chicago Bible Institute that, after Moody’s death, became Moody Bible Institute that remains strong to this day.

The Chicago school proved to be a mere prelude to the planting of other educational institutions. Mr. Moody began to share his ever-widening vision to see men and women, both young and old, be mentored and educated as part of “the work” to spread the gospel all over America and to the ends of the earth. Moody networked with prosperous men in Chicago, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia—among them John Farwell the Chicago dry-goods king; John Wannamaker, a Philadelphia department store magnate; Philip Armour, the meat-packing mogul; Colonel Julius J. Estey, of Estey Organ Company fame; and philanthropists such as Mrs. Cyrus P. (Nettie) McCormick. Moody personally invested in these people—helping them to grow in their faith and unabashedly asking them to help underwrite training for economically deprived young people. In the final analysis, a powerful network of Christian philanthropists, educators, and ministers formed that enabled several of Moody’s visions to become reality.

Besides building a church and school in Chicago, Moody secured property in Northfield, Massachusetts. With the help of his prosperous supporters, the increasingly famous evangelist bought land and erected buildings near his birthplace where Mother Moody lived until her death a few days before her ninety-first birthday in 1896.

Because Dwight and Emma Moody and their three children lived humbly and frugally in Chicago or with Mother Moody in Massachusetts, there was never a hint of Moody personally profiting from these funds. Always careful to spend as little as possible and thereby use more resources for “the work,” funds materialized and able directors helped Moody launch three schools in Northfield. First came the Northfield Seminary for Young Women. Moody’s desire was to provide college preparatory education for lower-economic-class girls in New England, who, on their own, would never be able to get the quality education required to attend a New England college. By autumn 1879 the seminary opened for young women who were given scholarships from funds provided by philanthropists. At the Northfield Seminary, young women studied liberal arts and sciences from a decidedly Christian worldview that was enriched by classes in Bible, church history, and theology.

The Northfield School produced so many able young women—most of whom headed to college and the mission field—that the vision expanded to offer a similar school.
Evangelist and Master Disciple Maker

for young men. In the early 1880s, Mount Herman opened its doors for boys, and the dormitory and classes were filled with socially and economically disadvantaged young men. What became a remarkable distinctive of both the Boys’ School and Northfield women’s seminary were their racial diversity. Black, brown, and yellow-skinned men and women attended these schools, and Christian speakers and preachers—black, white, and Asian—ascended the pulpits and podiums of both schools. Such diversity was unknown in most schools in the United States at that time.

To complement the Chicago Bible School and the two preparatory seminaries in Northfield, Mr. Moody felt constrained to launch one more school. During his preaching tours all over New England and the northeast in the late 1870s and 1880s, Moody discovered a class of women he wanted to help. Typically they were rural women with little or no formal schooling. They had committed their lives to Christ and his kingdom at one of Moody’s meetings and soon thereafter felt called to foreign or home missions. To be sure there was a growing demand for women to serve in foreign missions, and there was a pressing need for women to minister in America’s growing cities. Countless urban churches were calling for women to do evangelism and house-to-house personal work among the urban poor. Moody wanted to connect the women called to serve with the cities needing workers.

The Northfield Seminary was no option for these women, many of whom were barely literate; furthermore, because they were already in their twenties, thirties, or forties, they would never have meshed with the Northfield Seminary culture. The Chicago Bible Institute was certainly an option, but it only had room for 250—and it was [always] full. Also, it was a thousand miles away from most of the women seeking help.

Moody often prayed and said, “Lord Jesus I wish I could look into your face and ask you what I should do. Please help me equip these folks you have selected as ‘chosen vessels.’” Invariably the faithful evangelist and disciple maker would get a nudge or an illumination. This time he felt led to go to the manager of “The Northfield,” a hotel where well-to-do Christians went for summer holidays and Bible conferences. “The Northfield” remained vacant during the tourist off season, from October to March. Moody asked the manager if he could rent the three-story, red-brick structure that was graced on three sides with lounging verandas overlooking large lawns and gardens. The spacious hotel with its well-appointed rooms, complete with large windows, draperies, beds, writing desks, and comfortable furniture, was only used between April and September.

The manager of “The Northfield” knew Mr. Moody well. Likewise he shared the preacher’s desire to see disciples trained who could reach unchurched people. Soon an arrangement was finalized, and in October 1890 fifty-six women from eleven states and seven Christian denominations arrived for six months of in-depth training in English Bible, Christian doctrine, and practical theology, as well as music, nursing, cooking, sewing, and hygiene. By the time of Mr. Moody’s death in 1899, more than seven hundred women had completed one to four terms at the Northfield Bible Training School, a Bible and vocational institution. There they were prepared to do personal work that included teaching Scripture to adults and children. They also learned to

Grace means undeserved kindness. It is the gift of God to man the moment he sees he is unworthy of God’s favor.

D.L. Moody
pray, make clothes for the needy, and prepare food for the sick. Quite astonishingly, this was done without purchasing a building or establishing an endowment. Instead, people of means were asked to help underwrite the hundred dollars per term that the students were charged, because few, if any, had the means to fully pay their own way.

Books and Conferences

Dwight Moody also adopted less formal means to equip people. Early on in ministry, Moody saw the need for Christian books and magazines. To that end he managed to get his brother-in-law, Fleming H. Revell, to launch what became a highly successful publishing house where books by men such as A. J. Gordon, F. B. Meyer, R. A. Torrey, A. T. Pierson, D. W. Whittle, and Moody himself were published and circulated throughout the English-speaking world.

When Fleming Revell refused to risk expanding his publishing company into the untried field of inexpensive paperback books, Moody began his own publishing company, the Bible Institute Colportage Association. This venture produced hundreds of new titles that could be inexpensively printed and distributed to prisons, jails, schools, and churches and eventually became Chicago’s famous Moody Publishing and Moody Press.

Besides printing inexpensive books as methods for evangelism and disciple making, Mr. Moody became an early advocate of summer conferences. Utilizing the hills and rocky fields surrounding his boyhood home and the Northfield and Mount Hermon Schools, Moody sponsored week-long summer Bible and deeper-life conferences where some of the world’s best Bible teachers and preachers were brought to teach and inspire laymen and women.

Finally, D. L. Moody, who always had a burden to train young people for “the work,” sponsored summer conferences for college students. His first such meeting was held on the Mount Hermon Boys’ School campus from July 7 to 31, 1886. More than 240 students traveled by train and foot, lived in tents or in the open air, to be mentored by authors, missionaries, and preachers whom God would use to call them to home and foreign ministry. Soon students from as far away as the United Kingdom, Japan, German, Norway, and Siam descended upon northwestern Massachusetts—making tiny Northfield a place of international significance.

Conclusion

Few people have done more than Dwight L. Moody to evangelize lost souls and mentor and train the next generation to fulfill the Great Commission. What explains his extraordinary success? First of all, from the moment he heard the British evangelist Henry Varley say, “It remains to be seen what the Lord can do with a man wholly consecrated to Christ,” the idea captivated him. He determined to be such a man. Moody was a “chosen vessel,” to be sure. But he gradually became a man with a single eye. Few men or women in modern times have been as determined as Dwight L. Moody to experience the truth of 2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the whole earth, to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” Every person who knew Moody well observed his love for Jesus Christ, his passion for souls, and commitment to do what he believed the Lord called him to do. To his friend D. W. Whittle he wrote, “I have done one thing, and the work is wonderful. One thing is my motto.” His son Will said, “Nothing could sever him from this deep-rooted purpose of his life, and in all the various educational and publishing projects to which he gave his energy. . . . There was but one motive—the proclamation of the Gospel through multiplied agencies.”

Sources: For this article, I have relied upon Lyle W. Dorsett, A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody (1997).

The Rev. Dr. Lyle Dorsett holds the Billy Graham Chair of Evangelism at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. He is the author of numerous books, among them biographies of Joy Davidman (Mrs. C. S. Lewis), E. M. Bounds, Dwight L. Moody, and Billy Sunday. Dr. Dorsett is ordained in the Anglican Church and serves as Senior Pastor of Christ the King Anglican Church in Homewood, Alabama. Lyle and his wife, Mary, have two children and four grandchildren. The Dorsett’s founded and currently serve as directors of Christ for Children International, a mission to the economically and spiritually impoverished in Mexico.
Getting Intentional About Discipleship

(continued from page 3)

disciples, most churches have not made discipleship a priority. Dallas Willard calls this our “Great Omission.”

Few churches give their congregations any compelling vision of discipleship. Fewer put discipleship expectations on their members beyond regular attendance and giving. And fewer still have a discipleship process that includes: spiritual health assessments and monitoring, personal spiritual growth plans, needs-related resources for spiritual development, and teaching, preaching, and programs structured around discipleship outcomes.

If the Church is to reverse its course and reclaim its calling as a culture-shaper, it must get intentional about discipleship. And that starts by defining what discipleship is all about. For example: “Discipleship is a life-long process, transforming believers to think, act and love like Jesus which begins, inwardly, with personal response to the gospel and moves outwardly with a passion to advance the Kingdom.”

Corporate statements (mission, vision, values) should elevate discipleship as a foremost church goal. Expectations of membership should include a commitment to the life-long process of intellectual, spiritual, and behavioral transformation. Church leaders should assess, and periodically monitor, the spiritual health of their congregation using appropriate health measures.

In my 30 years in the nuclear industry, one maxim that proved true over and over is “What gets measured is what gets done.” Turning that into a question for the Church: “What must be measured to ensure that discipleship ‘gets done?’”

Assessing Church Health

Nearly all churches determine their health through some combination of church attendance, baptisms, and giving. If those numbers are up, the church is in peak shape; if they are flat, the church is stable and holding; and if they are trending down, it’s time for a transfusion. Yet, those “business school” indicators are not reliable measures of church health.

High attendance could mean we’re playing to the crowd, entertaining the audience, telling people what their itching ears want to hear. Low attendance could mean that we’re actually preaching the Cross and the Yoke, a message that many people find more than they “signed on” for.

“Giving” is strongly influenced by the economic conditions of the times and church demographics. It does not tell us whether people are tithing (i.e., 10 percent) or giving sacrificially. It is merely a number that defines the church budget. A church that cannot make budget could be a church whose members have lost jobs or taken pay cuts, or one that is overly leveraged in paid staff, facilities, equipment, and programs. On the other hand, a church with a fat budget may be the beneficiary of wealthy members whose contributions are large, but far less than a tithe.

Yet, even if those measures reliably tracked spiritual health, they suffer from being lagging, rather than leading, indicators.
That’s because they are symptoms of underlying spiritual causes (ignorance of biblical teaching, lack of spiritual disciplines, sinful attitudes or behaviors). Thus, once a negative trend is established, many a church has found itself in a fight for survival.

A while back I was on the leadership team of a church with growing attendance and a commensurate budget, but with need for greater biblical literacy among its members. This, despite the fact that it had a gifted pastor who ably expounded the scripture every Sunday! To sow the seed for what I hoped would become a disciple-building process, I proposed a member-wide “spiritual health” survey during a team meeting.

My proposal had a cool reception: “I think our people are pretty well balanced,” one leader temporized; “I wonder how it [answering questions about their spiritual health] will make them feel,” fretted another. Most acknowledged that it was a good idea, in principle; but one for which our people weren’t quite ready.

It wasn’t long before a bitter crisis developed that led to a church split with over one-third of the congregation leaving. A contributing cause was the lack of understanding (or acceptance) of biblical teachings on Church mission and on the divisions of authority and responsibility in the Church. What’s more, because of reliance on “bodies, bucks, and buildings,” the crisis and its fallout blind-sided everyone.

Instead of using such Wall Street indicators, churches should select measures that are more closely and directly tied to discipleship outcomes. (See chart on this page.)

Ideally, small group leaders would collect these data and return them to church staff for compilation. The results would be used to identify “areas of improvement” and help staff set church priorities for the coming year.

For example, if most indicators range between 20 and 50 percent, but evangelism comes in at 5 percent, it would mean that evangelism needs increased emphasis in teaching, programs, and small group curricula.

For congregations without comprehensive small groups, a one-page survey could be developed for members to complete anonymously and turned into the church office.

**Assessing Member Health**

While assessing corporate health is essential for establishing church priorities, assessing member health is necessary to address needs at the individual level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipleship Outcome</th>
<th>Church Health Indicator: What percentage of your congregation…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salvation</td>
<td>Have received Jesus as Lord and Savior?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Are pursuing spiritual formation through:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>regular corporate worship (at least 3 times per month)?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>small group study?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>spiritual disciplines?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are involved in an accountability relationship?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Are mentoring another person?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know their spiritual gift(s)?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tithe (i.e., 10 percent)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inreach</td>
<td>Are using their giftedness within the church?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Are using their gift(s) in the workplace and community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism</td>
<td>Are intentional in forging relationships with the unchurched?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are intentional in sharing their faith with non-believers?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual assessment begins with each member taking stock of their spiritual condition and identifying their own areas for improvement. Members would select two or three of their greatest needs (ranked 4) for improvement. They would then develop a spiritual growth plan with at least one other person to provide mutual guidance, support, and accountability. Each should help the other identify goals that are appropriate, achievable, and measurable.

For instance, if “Prayer” is selected as an area for improvement, “experience a richer prayer life,” while appropriate is not measurable. Instead, goals might include (1) read Richard Foster’s book *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, (2) attend a prayer seminar or conference, (3) pray “x” minutes every day, (4) enlist a prayer partner, (5) become an intercessor, (6) join a prayer group.

Throughout the year—say, once every three months—members should reevaluate their spiritual needs, and revise their growth plans accordingly.

A Matter of Faith

Admittedly, what I have just outlined places demands on people far beyond what some—maybe many—will be willing to accept.

Pastors will look at the suggestions for revised mission statements, new health indicators, corporate assessments, individual assessments, monitoring, and small group formation and feel overwhelmed at the upfront “cost” of promotion, development and implementation; not to mention dealing with push-back from the pews. They may fear that the initiative could lead to a mass exodus. For a church heavily invested in buildings, facilities and salaried staff that is a valid concern. But, as Jesus warned, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Matt 22:14).

And yet the long-term returns are inestimable. Disciples are people transitioning from ministry consumers to ministry providers. Every person who is discipled helps free up pastors to devote more of their energies to the spiritual vision and direction of the church, and the selection and the development of leaders.

Getting intentional about discipleship, in the end, is a matter of faith. We can put our faith in the status quo, doing what we’ve always done and getting what we’ve always gotten—undiscipled Christians in churches dying by attrition; or we can put our faith in God, correcting our Great Omission and trusting that the branches that wither away and die or are cut off, will be replaced by new growth that will multiply ten, twenty, a hundred fold.

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This article is modified and expanded from one that first appeared on BreakPoint online.
Living Faithfully in a Fallen World  
(continued from page 5)

so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Gal.5.17). He captures the reality and pain of that struggle for the Christian when writing to the Romans:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom.7.24)

The believer, now a child of God by grace, desires out of gratitude to God to reflect the likeness of Christ; however, the Christian still battles with the sin that is all around and all too often seduces us to forget the love of Christ that is the ground of our life of gratitude. However, even when we sin, we are not left alone, but God the Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer, produces a remembrance of what Christ has done to redeem us and makes us sorrowful for the sin; that sorrow produces repentance.

Historically the development of the doctrine of sanctification has concerned the clarification of several issues, the foremost in importance being the relationship of grace and sanctification. Because the early church was involved with other questions, little was written on this subject; this lack enabled practices to develop without solid biblical and theological reflection. There arose a confusion about the place of faith and good works, which led to the mistaken idea that sin committed before baptism was washed away, while sin committed after baptism demands some form of human penance to find forgiveness. Later medieval thinkers further confused the church by suggesting that in justification God infused a grace into the soul that enabled it to achieve its destiny. Thus Christ together with good works enabled individuals to be saved. The rediscovery by the Reformers of the grace of God saw the separation of the justification and sanctification, so justification was immediate, the work of God alone, while sanctification, while still being gracious because of the work of the Spirit, was also an ongoing work that required faith and obedience and the mortifying of the flesh.

It is important to understand that sanctification is a gracious work of God, which stands as a sharp rebuke to the “activism” that shapes much of the understanding of the Christian life in many circles today. Sanctification flows from justification and is the fruit of that justification. While man is privileged to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification, he can do so only because the presence of the Spirit within imparts strength to do so, making clear that the spiritual development of the individual is a work of divine grace.

The Holy Spirit clearly uses “means” for our growth, and the gospel is the key to our growth. As Martin Luther said, “The truth of the gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine.” The gospel is, said Paul, “the power of God for salvation.” It is also the instrument of all continual growth and spiritual progress after we have been converted to Christ, bearing fruit and growing in the believer. The Holy Spirit uses this gospel to build us up as citizens of the new kingdom. Fundamental to the New Testament is the understanding that Christians live in an overlap of the ages where the new kingdom of Christ has been ushered in by his coming, yet it awaits its consummation.

Progressive sanctification is subjective or experiential and is the work of the Holy Spirit within us imparting to us the life and power of Christ, enabling us to respond in obedience to Him.

Jerry Bridges
Living Faithfully in a Fallen World

on his return. Until that day we live in a world where darkness continues, and where we live in the reality of the kingdom’s presence and being aware that it is not yet fully come. Because of the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live with the confidence

Christ has added us to his family the church, and our growth is encouraged and sustained by the godly discipline within the body of Christ to the end that we grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord.

that the power of the kingdom has come and exists in the midst of gathered Christians:

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 1:20–21).

While Jesus made clear that the kingdom would not arrive in its fullness until the end of time, all believers have already been transferred into that kingdom, and amidst the darkness of the present evil age, we dwell as those who are already reigning in heaven. This knowledge inculcates into every Christian the balance between confidence and humility. For while we are still sinners, we are justified sinners; and while living in this world we are also citizens of heaven, so that the Reformers could affirm that we are simul justus et peccator, both sinful and righteous.

A person who is justified by the application of the work of Jesus Christ is declared holy judicially, but not rendered fully holy in thought, word, and deed at the same moment. Instead that person is strengthened and motivated to struggle against the remains of sin in his or her soul. This struggle produces a progression in holiness as the believer grows more and more into conformity with the image of Christ. This enables us to maintain the scriptural balance of being the adopted sons and daughters of God and thus free from the condemnation of the law, and yet still striving to be what we are in Christ and lovers of the law, which is the reflection of the character of God our Father. It enables us also to avoid the twin errors of legalism and licentiousness, which Tertullian, a North African church father, so famously called “thieves of the gospel.” Legalists stress law over gospel, and the licentious celebrate grace and freedom without the response of gratitude. Legalists turn the Christian experience and life into a moralism, which asserts in practice, if not in words, that one becomes acceptable to God by moral attainment, living often by rules and regulations. The licentious, however, reduce the Christian life to one of pragmatism, dwelling only on the love of God and thinking of love as an emotion rather than a costly act of sacrifice. Both succeed in reducing the significance and efficacy of the cross of Christ and produce a distorted Christian walk.

An issue that arose within the life of the church has also helped shape the biblical understanding of the doctrine of sanctification: the question as to the degree of sanctification that is to be attained in this life, with some following in the thought of John Wesley advocating perfectionism. They suggest that because God has commanded that we should be holy as he is holy, then it must be his will that we shall be so, and he has enabled us to accomplish this. Yet the Scripture leaves us in no doubt that perfection is not attainable now. The apostle John stated this plainly when he wrote:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:8–10).

With these words the apostle makes clear that all believers continue to sin; indeed that
is the reason that we rely upon the grace of God that brings to us both repentance and pardon. Well into his own life, the apostle Paul affirms the same truth, ruling out moral perfection for himself:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12–14).

The root of perfectionism lies in the false premise that God will never demand from us what we cannot ourselves do, and reflects the influence of the Pelagian teaching that sees man's nature uninjured by the Fall of Adam. Instead such teaching sees mankind as being guilty of only those sins that are committed personally and voluntarily. It further argues that men and women both before and after Adam's Fall were and are fully able to obey God's law, therefore being able to live sinlessly. Such a teaching of course understands grace as simply making human obedience easier.

On the opposite end of the spectrum concerning the conflict with sin that remains in the human heart are those who have devised the doctrine of the “carnal Christian,” who base their thought upon 1 Corinthians where Paul writes: “But I, brothers, I could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ” (3:1). They argue that there are two classes of Christians, the spiritual and the carnal, because when a man or woman becomes a Christian, while the guilt of their sin is removed and the assurance of eternal life is given to them, there is no change in their nature. Thus it is possible to live as an unbeliever and yet no longer be subject to the penalty of sin. Only when there is a subsequent decision to accept Jesus as Lord does the carnal Christian become the spiritual Christian. However, such teaching misses the clear point of Paul's teaching. For the apostle is not speaking to a whole class of believers but rather to those he names as “messengers of the gospel,” whose work at planting and tending the gospel will be judged. In Corinth Paul and Apollos had faithfully proclaimed the gospel of Christ and seen the fruit of their labor as there were new converts added to the church. He knew that while these were real believers, their manner of life was not consistent with the gospel that they had embraced. So he was warning them not to abandon the gospel by mixing it with carnal and fleshly behavior, but rather to live in the world as true disciples of Christ who had made them alive.

The reality of the conflict with sin is the context of the sanctification of every believer. While it is not a struggle for unbelievers, it is a struggle for all Christians, and there is no simple or quick solution to that struggle. Instead we are given the Spirit, who encourages us in that struggle and who uses the outward means of the Scripture and the sacraments to minister the gospel to us in our pilgrimage. Christ has added us to his family the church, and our growth is encouraged and sustained by the godly discipline within the body of Christ to the end that we grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord.

Tell me not of your justification, unless you have also marks of sanctification. Boast not of Christ’s work for you, unless you can show us the Spirit’s work in you.

J.C. Ryle
to personal commitment. This third dimension of faith is what the Reformers called fiducia. Christian faith requires a personal element of trust, reliance and allegiance, for isn’t the gospel a means of restoring a broken relationship?

Consider the analogy of the most intimate of human relationships, that of marriage. A man and a woman may be attracted to each other and may get to know the content of each other’s character. They may become convinced that they would make good marriage partners. But marriage requires more than that. Their faith must be put on the line; they must make a commitment to one another—a very personal commitment. Real faith comes only when they forsake all others and say, “I do.” For that reason the marriage vow is called “a pledge of faith.” Our response to the call of Christ in discipleship is simply our “pledge of faith” to him. That response of faith is not our contribution to the saving work of God any more than accepting a marriage proposal earns the love of the one who proposes. It is simply the means of receiving God’s saving grace in Christ.

We believe that Christ died for us, but we also believe in him—that is, we entrust ourselves to his care and submit ourselves to his lordship. Saving faith does not mean that we will obey him perfectly, for we are still a part of the old, fallen world, but it does mean that as Lord he has the right to command our obedience.

So faith not only has a personal dimension, it also has moral significance. For this reason, an essential aspect of real saving faith is repentance. The gospel message has meaning only within a moral framework, for it assumes that we have rebelled against God’s rightful authority in our lives. We are now sinners in need of a Savior, and to believe the gospel one must agree with this basic truth. Faith in Christ implies that a person no longer wants to remain in this state of rebellion but desires rescue from sin and reconciliation with God. Christian conversion, as Paul describes it, involves “turning from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). Repentance is simply a description of that “change of mind” intrinsic to this turning toward God. It is a recognition of the moral order that God has established, and repentance is a desire to align oneself within that order. And this same call to repentance, this “turning,” is entailed in Jesus’ command to “come, follow me.” Thus, discipleship is inherent in true, repentant faith.

The Profound Work of the Holy Spirit

A third point of confusion regarding the relationship of grace to discipleship results from a failure to grasp the profound work of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s scathing words to the Galatians ring too true for many Christians: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Gal. 3:3).

Most will acknowledge the central role of the Holy Spirit in conversion. Only by the convicting and regenerating work of the Spirit is saving faith even possible. Our faith is itself a gift of God. Sadly, however, many restrict the Spirit’s work to this initial entry point of the Christian life and assume that they are on their own from that point. They leave the gospel of grace behind. They hear the imperatives of Scripture—the call of discipleship and the demands of holiness—and

Moral striving is both an essential part of spiritual growth... and a ground of self-despair which sensitizes the individual to the grace of Jesus Christ.

Robert C. Roberts
consider that success depends entirely on human effort. They feel the force of Paul’s admonition to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12), but they forget to read to the end of the sentence. There Paul grounds his imperative on an essential indicative: “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (2:13). The Holy Spirit is not only graciously involved in our conversion but also in the ongoing work of sanctification in our lives.

We must not think of the human will as some autonomous force, divorced from the gracious hand of God. The same God who commands also empowers us to respond to those commands. This does not diminish the force of his commands nor our responsibility to obey them. But it gives us hope that obedience is possible, and it results in glory to God when our obedience is realized.

This profound work of the Spirit is what the prophets of the Old Testament spoke of so clearly. Ezekiel prophesied a coming day when the Lord would act powerfully to overcome the sin of his people—“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezek. 36:26–27). This is the promise of the New Covenant of which Jeremiah spoke when he declared that the Lord would “put [his] law in their minds and write it on their hearts” (Jer. 31:31–34). We now live in that new age inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We must realize that in his atoning work on the cross, God acts in Christ outside of us, but his saving work also involves us as persons. God does not act apart from but through our wills—changing us so that we might become like Jesus. Just as our justifying faith is ultimately his gift, so is our willingness to walk in the path of discipleship. They are different aspects of the same reality.

The Puritan John Owen reflects on this relationship between our duty and God’s grace:

Let us consider what regard we ought to have to our own duty and to the grace of God. Some would separate these things as inconsistent. If holiness be our duty, they would say, there is no room for grace; and if it be the result of grace there is no place for duty. But our duty and God’s grace are nowhere opposed in the matter of sanctification; for one absolutely supposes the other. We cannot perform our duty without the grace of God; nor does God give his grace for any other purpose than that we may perform our duty.

We cannot fathom how God’s Spirit works in and through our wills to accomplish his good purpose. We must affirm, however, that he does. Again, as Owen puts it: “God works in us and for us, not against us and without us.” Let us hear the command of Christ in discipleship, and let us respond in obedience, knowing in the end that it is only by the gracious work in us by his Spirit that we are enabled to obey.

The Essential Foundation of Christian Identity: Our Union with Christ

Finally, the grace of God in the gospel and the demanding call of discipleship find their unity in the essential foundation of Christian identity—our union with Christ.
Discipleship or Grace: Must It Be One or the Other?

All the benefits that accrue to us from Christ’s work are ours only as we are united to Christ’s Person. To be separate from Christ is to be “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). But to be “in Christ” is to share in all his riches (Eph. 1:3).

The Holy Spirit joins us personally to Jesus who died and rose again so that we now share in all that he is. This mysterious union is pictured in various ways in the New Testament, but the horticultural metaphor used by Jesus may be most to the point here: “I am the vine, and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). In this faith-union with Christ we share in who he is—we are graciously clothed with his righteousness and share in his sonship. But from that life-giving union we also draw the nourishment and strength to live as Christ’s disciples, bearing fruit to his glory. Here is subsumed both the privilege and the responsibility, the grace and the duty, of the Christian life.

The famous words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28–30 illustrate well the two sides of grace and discipleship grounded in union with Christ: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

This is surely a call to discipleship, for we are to come to Jesus and learn from him (cf. Matt. 4:19; 28:19–20). Yet this call is graciously addressed to those “who are weary and burdened,” “Taking the yoke of Jesus” means submitting to his authority in an unqualified dependence (cf. Matt. 10:37–39). But how could such a thing be considered “easy” and “light” since its demands are more weighty and its content more strict than the law as interpreted by the Pharisees (cf. Matt. 5:17–48)?

This is a gracious offer only because of the new relationship with God which Jesus’ yoke (and discipleship itself) makes possible. The yoke we bear is the yoke of the Son who alone makes the Father known (Matt. 11:27). As we commit ourselves to him, we are joined to Jesus the Son such that we, too, become sons of God and so enter into the “rest” which Jesus comes to bring. Grace and discipleship, forgiveness and holiness, are not antithetical but in perfect harmony, for they flow out of and lead into the same reality—our union with Christ.

Conclusion

Christianity is not a self-help religion, but a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that brings new life by the Spirit that will ultimately result in the restoration of the divine image in us. Faith is our personal response to the Person of Christ, and by the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit we are joined with him. In our union with Christ, we are forgiven and in that union we are regenerated. We now participate in Christ—he is in us by the Spirit, and, in Martin Luther’s words, Christ himself is “the basis, the cause, the source of all our own actual righteousness.” Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs speaks of the connection between growth in personal holiness and the believer’s union with Christ: “from [Christ] as from a fountain, sanctification flows into the souls of the Saints: there sanctification comes not so much from their struggling, and endeavors, and vows, and resolutions, as it comes flowing to them from their closing with Christ and their union with him.” As we entrust ourselves to Christ and depend upon him, we are like branches that draw on the vitality of the vine to produce good fruit. Discipleship is simply the working out of this new life in Christ. We become in ourselves what we are in Christ. The righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith is imparted to us as we follow him—and it is all by God’s grace.
wanting to be spared but submitting to his Father’s will on the cross.

Jesus not only lived a life of faith before his disciples, he called them to live a life of faith as well. First and foremost he called them to put their trust in him as Messiah and Son of God. But he didn’t stop there. He called them to an active, living faith in their heavenly Father in the affairs of everyday life. Whether for daily bread or power to heal the sick and cast out demons or to overcome the perils of nature, they were to live by faith and to grow in faith. Each challenge they encountered was an opportunity for growth. They were slow to learn the lessons of faith, and most of us probably identify with them and give them a pass. But Jesus never did. When the disciples were in danger of drowning in a storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus upbraided them for their fear and lack of faith (Mark 4:35–41). When they were unable to cast out a demon, he told them it was due to their lack of faith (Matt. 17:14–21). Growing in faith was a very important part of maturing as a disciple. He expected them to grow in faith as they saw his mighty deeds, and he expected them to trust God to answer their prayers—even to “move mountains” to advance his kingdom.

One of the saddest commentaries on the church in the West today is the weakness of our faith. Secularism has seriously eroded our belief in the almighty, miracle-working God of the Bible, who answers the prayers of his people and intervenes in the affairs of the world. We have embraced a reductionism that acknowledges faith in Christ as essential for salvation but largely ignores the necessity of living by faith thereafter. How many of us really live each day with a confident trust in God to do what he says he will do? How many of us take him at his word and act with the expectation that he will be faithful? This is the kind of faith that Jesus calls us to exercise as we seek to follow him. It is the kind of faith we see in William Carey, the father of modern missions, who said, “Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God.” Or Hudson Taylor, the famed missionary who opened up China to the gospel. Or George Müller of Bristol, who over many decades, by simple faith in God and his word, prayed in the finances to feed, clothe, shelter, and educate thousands of orphans daily without telling anyone but God of his need. (If you want to be strengthened in your faith, read The Spiritual Autobiography of George Müller.)

Of course, such faith does not suddenly appear in our lives. It is something that grows over time as we read, mark, and inwardly digest God’s Word with the help of the Holy Spirit and prayerfully act on it in the obedience of faith. When we do this, God uses the needs, opportunities, and circumstances of our lives as a training ground to help us grow in faith, fulfill his purposes, and bring him glory. At the heart of following Jesus, then, is walking by faith in God, just as he did, and not living by reliance on our own limited wit, wisdom, and resources.

The other major defining characteristic of Jesus’ life was love. Jesus lived a life of love. He loved his Father with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. And he loved others and sought their good.

This may sound commonplace to those who have been in church for a while. And we may wrongly assume that we know what it means. Our ideas about love may be shaped by unrecognized cultural assumptions and may be far from correct. Thus a
Following Jesus Christ

brief examination of Jesus’ teaching on love may prove helpful.

The cornerstone of Jesus’ teaching on love is found in the Great Commandment:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:34–40).

The first of these two commands, found originally in Deuteronomy 6:5, lies at the heart of the Old Testament’s teaching about how God’s people are to relate to him. Before they ever knew him, God loved Israel and chose them to be his special people. He demonstrated his love by rescuing them from slavery, giving them a land flowing with milk and honey and promising them great blessings in the future. In return, he asked for wholehearted love and devotion, to be expressed in obedience to his covenant.

Jesus teaches that God still seeks the wholehearted love of his people and that responding to his love is to be our highest priority. Thus we should spare no effort in seeking to grow in love. But what is love? Have you ever pondered that question? In pop-culture and contemporary usage, the word love is closely associated with feeling and sentiment; this tends to color our thinking. It is easy for us unconsciously to sentimentalize the call to love God and reduce it to a matter of feeling. But while feeling is certainly a part of loving God, it is not the heart of the matter. In the Bible the essence of loving God is to give ourselves fully to him who first loved us, to surrender to his love and devote ourselves to him. That is the point of “all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength” (italics added). Just as a woman gives herself to a man who deeply loves her and asks her hand in marriage, so we are called to give ourselves to the God who loves us and has redeemed us at the price of his own dear Son. Far from being an arbitrary demand, this command is an entreaty of love.

You may wonder how you could possibly love God this way. To be sure, it is not a natural human ability. Paul tells us that “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). And this love grows as we continue to live a gospel-centered life, meditating on and reminding ourselves daily of God’s love for us and Christ’s sacrifice for us. Assurance that God loves you deeply evokes an answering love for him that increases over time and is essential to living the Christian life.

What does this kind of love look like in daily life? The answer may surprise you: obedience to God’s will as found in Scripture. According to the Bible, obedience is the acid test of true love for God. Jesus makes this clear when he says, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15 NIV). So does the apostle John, who says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3 ESV). If we love God, his commands will not be burdensome or irksome to us. Rather, we will desire to obey him. Do you desire to obey God and bring him pleasure through your obedience? The more we ponder and marvel at the good news of the gospel, the more we will want to please him.
Some people today mistakenly equate obedience with legalism and see it as the enemy of grace. But actually the opposite is true. Legalism comes from trying to earn God’s favor by obedience and sacrifice. The Pharisees were famous for this, and we can easily fall into it today by insisting on commitment and obedience without grounding it in grace and love. Obedience offered in love is the fruit of grace and is an antidote to legalism.

The second part of the Great Commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves, originates in Leviticus 19:18 and reflects the nature of God and his deep concern that we seek the good of others and bless them. Again, many people are confused about what it means to love our neighbor, thinking that it means to feel emotional warmth, sympathy, or closeness toward them. However, the agape love that is enjoined here is not primarily emotional in nature. It is chiefly volitional, an act of the will. It is acting in the best interest of the other person, seeking their good, regardless of how you happen to feel toward them. Jesus makes this very clear when he says: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). This is a wonderfully liberating command, because while it is not possible to feel emotionally close to everyone we meet, it definitely is possible to act in their best interest. We can always treat them as we would want to be treated if we were in their situation. Happily, feelings often do arise in the wake of our actions, but it is the action not the feeling that is most important. This simple but profound guideline will show us our duty in nearly every case.

We have briefly looked at how the Great Commandment guides us in following Jesus. It remains to look at two specific commands Jesus gives elsewhere about loving our neighbor. The first deals with loving neighbors who are our enemies. You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:43-48).

He does not call us to a sloppy half-heartedness, but to a vigorous, absolute commitment. He calls us to make him our Lord.

of faith to please our Father, his Spirit will work in us and change our attitude toward our enemies. Such love glorifies God. Becoming perfect in love means growing into a mature love for others, which is a lifelong journey, but one on which we can make remarkable progress.

Jesus also gives his disciples a new standard for loving one another. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). This lifts love to its highest degree. We are to show the same self-sacrificing love toward
fellow believers as Jesus has shown toward us. So important is this that a few verses later he reiterates it and elaborates, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12–13). Jesus is about to lay down his life for them and tells them that they are to lay down their lives for their brothers and sisters in the family of God. Over the centuries, there have been times when this was fulfilled literally. More often, however, it has been fulfilled in meeting the needs of fellow believers for food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. John, for example, says, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16–18). This kind of love, says Jesus, demonstrates to the world that we are truly his disciples (Jn. 13:34-34). And the unity that such love produces witnesses to the world that God has sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world (Jn. 17:21).

If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that there is all too little of this kind of love among believers today. Instead, there is an abundance of criticism, contention, and division along with an unconscionable neglect of the poor. And we wonder why nonbelievers call us hypocrites and refuse to believe.

When we look carefully at the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, the call to “follow me” takes on much greater clarity and specificity. It is indeed a call to “walk as Jesus walked,” to live a life of radical faith and love. Once we truly grasp this, our first reaction is likely to be one of dismay. If we are at all aware of the depth of indwelling sin and the dysfunctions that plague our lives, we know it is impossible for us to fulfill such a call. Yet this reaction is actually healthy, because it is based in reality. It is indeed impossible for us to live this way. And that is precisely the point. Jesus knows we cannot follow him without a power beyond ourselves. And that is why he sent the Holy Spirit to empower us.

It is only through the indwelling Holy Spirit that we can obey the teaching of Jesus and follow his example. He assures us of the Father’s love, he makes the things of Christ real to us; he makes the gospel precious to us; he convicts us of sin and assures of forgiveness when we repent; he transforms us from glory to glory, into the likeness of Jesus (2 Cor. 3:16–18). That is why we are taught to earnestly seek to be filled with the Spirit each day (Eph. 5:18) and to be led by him in all our ways (Gal. 5:16–25). When we do, we will find that we can live in newness of life. Not perfectly and not immediately. But day by day, as we walk in faith and obedience, the Spirit will produce in us the character of Jesus: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.

C.S. Lewis
of St. Francis. And later, after Mother Teresa visited us, Doug traveled to India to see her and her work. After that he began putting his energy into helping the poor. Mother Teresa helped all of us see the powerful as poor, too. Strangely, though more attention has been given to the poor since Doug’s trip to Assisi and our times with Mother Teresa, the work with national leaders has grown.

Loda Coe was the person most responsible for Roy Cook becoming a follower of Jesus. She also introduced Doug to Jesus.

But it was Roy’s commitment to Doug and his willingness to lay down his life for him that set Doug on his lifelong journey in discipleship.

Roy, by example, demonstrated to Doug the benefits of Scripture memorization and prayer. Doug was a good student.

Doug is eighty-two today. I saw him at his home recently. He sat in a soft chair. I sat in a matching one close enough that I could grasp his hand. Between us was a shiny coffee table. I noticed he had a stack of three by five white cards sitting to the rear of the table. I could see a verse of Scripture typed on the top card. The edges of the cards were turned up and well worn.

Doug is still memorizing Scripture. Just like he and Roy did for sixty-eight years. He reads all parts of the Bible, but spends more time in the Gospels because he wants to “think more like Jesus, love more like Jesus, and talk more like Jesus.” For all these years, Roy and Doug gave themselves to loving God with all their hearts. And loving their wives and children, and brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, “as Jesus loved us.” This was always their supreme purpose in life.

Like Roy, Doug loves the Scriptures, but his goal today is the same as when he and Roy first opened the Word of God together: “make disciples.” Beginning first with himself. Then one or two others. Following Roy’s example, Doug concentrates on just one or possibly two men a year and spends his time with them. He does lots of other things, but this is what he feels is the most important thing he does.

One of the other things he does is write lots of letters. Has for decades. He signs all of them personally. Often more than a thousand a year. They are mailed to “friends” with whom Doug communicates with in almost all of the 247 nations of the world, having traveled to most of them.

Often he includes some brief “thoughts” in these letters, usually by famous leaders. Many times these “thoughts” are about Jesus.

All the years I’ve worked with him, Doug has been praying that God would raise up laborers in every nation of the world.
The Legacy of Roy Cook

It amazes me to think that though Roy Cook is now in heaven, his influence continues in more than two hundred nations, 80 percent of which he never visited.

Not only does Roy’s legacy continue through Doug, but also through Doug’s children, who are many, and through their friends. And through others Roy has mentored, like former Congressman Tony Hall, Governor Sam Brownback, and all those young people who aspire to be like Balaam’s ass.

So what are we to learn about discipleship from the life of this shy, almost unnoticed, follower of Jesus?

Before I address this question, I would like to ask you a question: Who do you believe was the most influential disciple maker among the apostles and disciples of the first century? If you say, “Paul,” we’ll be in agreement. The whole body of Jesus Christ feels the influence of Paul today when we read the New Testament letters, most of which he wrote.

But would the man who called himself the “chief of sinners,” Saul of Tarsus, ever have been what he became without an Ananias or a Barnabas?

Ananias was willing to meet with Saul when every other first-century follower of Jesus feared him. Barnabas, too, sought him out, even traveled long distances to meet with him privately. Later he partnered with him on a journey that changed Paul’s identity and launched him into a work of God that would impact every generation for twenty centuries. As I write this story today, I wonder, would we have the Book of Romans or the New Testament as it is without Ananias or Barnabas and their investment in Paul?

I believe God wanted us to have the canon of Scripture we have today; just the same, I’m thankful for the contribution made to Paul by these lesser-known men.

So what are the lessons we learn from Roy Cook’s life?

Most are not new; even so, they are good reminders. These are the four most important to me:

1. There is no limit to what God can do if we don’t care who gets the credit.
2. Long-range, daily faithfulness in prayer coupled with reading, memorization, and meditation on Scripture reap great gain.
3. Investing large amounts of time with one faithful person, possibly more gifted than myself, also has great reward.
4. Anyone can love a shy introvert like Roy Cook, as did Loda Coe, and tell him that Jesus has a plan for his or her life; Anyone can give his or her heart to one other person, as did Roy Cook.

May God grant us more witnesses like Loda Coe, who will love the unattractive. And, more faithful disciplers like Roy Cook.
“Here best we may learn the infinite importance of Christianity. How little it can deserve to be treated in that slight and superficial way, in which it is in these days regarded by the bulk of nominal Christians, who are apt to think it may be enough, and almost equally pleasing to God, to be religious in any way, upon any system. What exquisite folly it must be to risk the soul on such a venture, in direct contradiction to the dictates of reason, and the express declaration of the word of God! ‘How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?’”

William Wilberforce
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