

**DISCIPLESHIP: STANDARD NOT OPTIONAL**  
**HEBREWS 5:11 - 6:3**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

**M.I. JESUS' COMMAND TO MAKE DISCIPLES WAS NOT A SUGGESTION. IT WAS A COMMAND. WE ARE NOT ONLY TO LEAD PEOPLE TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST; WE ARE TO HELP PEOPLE MATURE IN THEIR WALK WITH HIM. IN ORDER TO HELP PEOPLE MATURE IN THEIR FAITH, WE MUST FIRST BECOME MATURE OURSELVES.**

I. EXPECTED TO MATURE IN KNOWLEDGE (Vs.11-14)

**THE SAD FACT IS THAT WE CANNOT HELP OTHERS MATURE IN THEIR WALK WITH CHRIST BECAUSE MOST OF US ARE NOT GROWING TO MATURITY OURSELVES.**

- A. A NEVER-ENDING JOURNEY (V. 11a)
- B. NEVER-ENDING EXCUSES (Vs. 11b-13)
  - 1. TEACHERS WHO NEED TO BE TAUGHT
  - 2. ADULTS WHO NEED TO BE BABIED
- C. NEVER-ENDING POWER (V. 14)

II. EXPECTED TO MATURE IN EXPERIENCE (Vs. 6:1-3)

**DISCIPLESHIP ENTAILS MUCH MORE THAN LEARNING BASIC BIBLE DOCTRINES. IT HAS TO DO WITH SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THROUGH THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE. MATURITY IS AN ATTITUDE.**

- A. LOOKING AHEAD (V. 1)
- B. QUIT LOOKING BACK (V. 2)
- C. AVANTI! SEMPRE AVANTI! (V.3)

III. EXPECTED TO BECOME MATURE DISCIPLES

**IF CHRIST'S COMMAND IS TO MAKE DISCIPLES, THEN FIRST WE MUST BECOME DISCIPLES. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN GROWTH IN CHRIST.**

- A. BEING DISCIPLED
- B. DISCIPLINING OTHERS

## **DISCIPLESHIP: STANDARD NOT OPTIONAL**

### **HEBREWS 5:11 - 6:3**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

Today, we are discussing the third purpose of the Christian life. We have said that our purpose as individual Christians, and the purpose of us collectively as the church, is to worship God. From that we said that our second purpose was to evangelize the lost. This morning we are going to talk about another purpose, discipleship. Next week we will look at fellowship and the following week, ministry. So it seems as if we find our individual lives and the life of our church centered around five purposes: worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and ministry.

Discipleship is a Biblical word that simply means growth. When we became Christians, it means -- as Jesus described it -- being born again. That is really a nice picture. As new Christians, we really are babies when it comes to our faith, and only know some basic things. We know that we are hopelessly lost without Jesus and the only way to be right in a relationship with God is through Jesus.

However, God does not want us to remain babies, He expects us to grow and mature in the faith. Too many Christians never seem to grow in their faith and in their relationship with God. Too many Christians have a twisted view of Christianity. Some think that once they receive Christ, that's all that is necessary to do. Consequently, they never pursue holiness. They go to church each week, listen to the sermon, but never seem to change or grow.

On the other hand, there are believers who have all these rules and regulations in their minds. They think that Christianity is obeying these rules and regulations only. Hence, they never grow out of their childish Christianity.

Once we give our lives to Christ, we are responsible to grow in our faith. Jesus'

expectation is that we grow and mature in our relationship with Him. For those of us who are parents, I can tell you there is nothing more satisfying than seeing our children grow to the point that we are no longer just their parents, we are their friends and peers, and it is extremely rewarding to enjoy a relationship with them as such. Jesus wants us to mature in our relationship with Him in the same ways.

In addition to our own personal growth, God expects us to disciple others. In other words, as we grow in our faith, we are to help and encourage others to grow as well. I know that as I grew in my faith, God brought several mentors into my life to help me along the way, and I have come to enjoy helping others grow along the way as well.

Let me share with you one of the saddest things for me to watch. I have seen people who have been Christians for many years who have not grown at all. They still think, believe, and act the same as they did when they first came to Christ. They don't ever experience joy or real victory because they are not growing. It pains me to see them make the same mistakes over and over without ever growing. They seem to suffer and never move forward. If you are a healthy Christian, then you are getting to know God more intimately every day. Your thinking and your behavior should be changing on a daily basis.

But alas, I can see that many Christians are like my father's friend. My dad had a friend who never seemed to grow up. He couldn't even learn lessons the hard way. One year this guy took my dad and some friends on a fishing/hunting trip to Canada. It was one of those remote lakes that they had to be flown into. At the end of the week, they had caught a lot of fish and shot several elk.

When the pilot came to pick them up, he weighed the fish and elk and said that he could not carry all that weight in his airplane. They would have to leave half of the catch behind.

My dad's friend said to the pilot, "But the plane we flew in last year was the exact same model and we carried out the same weight then as we have here."

Well, the pilot reluctantly loaded up the plane and headed out. Sure enough, there was not enough power to climb out of the valley with all the weight and the plane crashed. Thank God they were all safe. As they stumbled from the wreckage, the pilot and my dad asked my friend if he had any idea where they were.

"Well I'm not sure," said my dad's friend, "but I think we are about two miles from where we crashed last year."

Some people never learn. But it is my hope that all of us here at Devon Church will take discipleship seriously. I am hoping that each one of us is committed to growth.

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One of the last things Jesus told His disciples before He returned to heaven was that they were to make disciples of all nations. This is this morning's theme. Jesus' command to make disciples was not a suggestion, it was a command. We are not only to lead people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ; we are to help people mature in their walk with Him. In order to help people mature in their faith, we must first become mature ourselves.

I. EXPECTED TO MATURE IN KNOWLEDGE (Vs.11-14)

**THE SAD FACT IS THAT WE CANNOT HELP OTHERS MATURE IN THEIR WALK WITH CHRIST BECAUSE MOST OF US ARE NOT GROWING TO MATURITY OURSELVES.**

If you want to follow along, there is an outline in your bulletin and the passage we will be discussing is found on page 190 of your pew Bibles. Please keep in mind that even though the author of this book was writing to the church about 2,000 years ago, this letter is applicable to us today. In verses 11-14 of chapter 5, the author reminds us that we are expected to mature in

knowledge. Part of growing up in the faith is learning what is in the Bible. The sad fact is that we cannot help others mature in their walk with Christ because most of us are not growing to maturity ourselves.

A. A NEVER-ENDING JOURNEY (V. 11a)

Part of the problem is that we have the wrong idea of what it means to be a Christian. Some people think its simply about saying some magical words, being baptized, and going to church. However, the first half of verse 11 reminds us that our walk with Jesus is a never-ending journey. The author of Hebrews says, "We have much to say about this." He had just told them earlier that Jesus is our high priest. Since Jesus lived as a human being, He understands the full range of our experience. And even though Jesus was fully God, there were some things that even He could only learn through suffering. What is implied here is that there are many things that we can only learn by suffering.

Again, I need to say this because the church is filled with many immature Christians who believe that being Christian is a magical protection against suffering. There are preachers out there saying that if you are a believer and you are right with God then you should not experience illness or setbacks of any kind. I'm sure that there are many of us here that believe that. But the fact is that we can only mature in some areas through suffering. Suffering, illness, and other setbacks are all part of the journey of life. It is sad when we don't grow and mature as a result of the suffering.

Here is the Biblical view of what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian means that we are to grow in our relationship with God. Think about what that means. God created the entire universe merely by speaking it into existence. He is the author of all that is beautiful. We will spend an eternity with Him in heaven and still never get to know Him completely. If

that is the case then we need to view Christianity as a journey, not a destination. We need to keep growing because none of us are perfect. The way we get to know God better is to read our Bibles, meditate, pray, and ask God to teach us through our life-experiences (good and bad). The expectation is that we will experience peaks and valleys in life, but God will be there to walk with us and to give meaning to it.

#### B. NEVER-ENDING EXCUSES (Vs. 11b-13)

But alas, the second half of verse 11 through verse 13 tells us, we are filled with never-ending excuses. The Bible wants to teach us so much about faith and our daily walk through life, but we are slow to learn. In other words, we are just plain lazy. Just take a few moments to think about why you don't read and study the Bible daily. "I'm too busy." "It's boring." "It's hard to read." "I don't understand it." Think about all the excuses we make not to come to prayer meetings or why we don't get involved in the ministries at church.

For those of us who have been Christians for a long time, I think we need to ask ourselves where we are in our faith. Are we spiritual babies or are we growing? Look how absurd the author thinks the situation is.

#### 1. TEACHERS WHO NEED TO BE TAUGHT

First of all he describes teachers that need to be taught. He says, "Look, you guys have been Christians for a long time. You should have matured by now and become teachers. Yet, you have not grown one bit in your faith. Instead of being teachers, you need to be taught the elementary truths of the faith all over again. Here's how absurd it is. It would be like an English professor in the University, who should be teaching Shakespeare, Poe, Kierkegaard, and other greats, yet he himself has to go back to kindergarten and learn his ABC's all over again.

That is pretty cutting. How many Christians have been believers for 10, 20, 30 years

or more, and cannot teach a decent Bible lesson? Or worse, how many of us cannot dig into the Bible for ourselves, study it, and apply it to our own lives? How many of us do not know how to do personal Bible study? I am shocked at where the Christian church in the United States is today. I am talking about long time churchgoers. They know more about the "Wheel of Fortune" than the wheel of Ezekiel. They know the names of all the people on soap operas and sitcoms, yet they cannot name the twelve apostles. Most can find things in the TV guide in a second, but cannot find the book of Jonah in the Bible without looking up the page number in the table of contents. Most Christians in the United States have refused to grow up.

## 2. ADULTS WHO NEED TO BE BABIED

And that is why the author describes adults who need to be babied. Look at verse 13. The picture is an adult who wants to eat by drinking his meal from a bottle like a baby. In seminary these days, they teach young pastors not to use theological language because their congregations do not understand it. Most pastors have to tone down their sermons so much that they never deal with the real important issues in the Bible.

This is the reason so many Christians simply muddle through life and are not able to get it together. In fact, they seem to just float from one crisis to another. Many Christians are stuck because they have refused to grow. That is sad.

### C. NEVER-ENDING POWER (V. 14)

Because there is never-ending power available to us as described in verse 14. If we view Christianity as a never-ending adventure, we will continually look to grow. Babies have no idea of right and wrong. When they are hungry, they cry, when they poop in their pants, they cry and when they want attention, they cry.

However, people who are committed to growth, continue to read and study their Bibles

with an attitude to obey and put into practice what they have learned. Since suffering is a necessary part of life, we must look at it from that perspective. When suffering comes to immature Christians, they whine, complain, and say things like, "Why me? What's wrong?" The mature believer will immediately realize that all the disciples suffered, all the prophets suffered, and Jesus Himself suffered. If all the great people of the faith suffered then the real question should be, "Why not me?" The mature believer will learn to use suffering as a catalyst to make him stronger and bring him closer to God. The mature believer faces suffering by asking, "What can I learn from this experience and how can it make me stronger?"

Again, mature believers understand that all the greats endured suffering not on their own power, but by drawing on the power of God's Holy Spirit. That same Holy Spirit lives in each believer. As we humble ourselves and surrender to Him, the Holy Spirit will comfort us, encourage us, strengthen us, and teach us. All of us will have to face suffering and trials in life, that is part of being human. But, to suffer without understanding is tragic. The truth is that God wants us to grow in our understanding and to help others grow as well. The sad fact is we cannot help others mature in their walk with Christ, because most of us are not growing to maturity ourselves.

## II. EXPECTED TO MATURE IN EXPERIENCE (Vs. 6:1-3)

**DISCIPLESHIP ENTAILS MUCH MORE THAN LEARNING BASIC BIBLE DOCTRINES. IT HAS TO DO WITH SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THROUGH THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE. MATURITY IS AN ATTITUDE.**

In October I will start preaching through the book of Proverbs. It is what we call in Biblical Literature, Wisdom Literature. In the Bible wisdom is defined as taking God's laws, and putting them into practical, everyday situations. In chapter 6 verses 1-3, the author reminds us that God expects us to mature in experience as well. I think that sometimes we, as

evangelicals have reduced Christianity to the pursuit of correct knowledge. We read all sorts of books and are concerned about the right doctrine. We are careful to make sure that our theology is pure. But here is what God wants. Discipleship entails much more than learning some basic Bible doctrines. It's successfully navigating through the ups and downs of life. Maturity is an attitude. We must act on what we learn. For example, if I read in the Bible that I am to be a more loving and patient husband, then that is exactly what I am going to practice. If I read in the Bible that I am to be more gracious with others, then that is exactly what my assignment for the day is. We learn what is expected of us by reading the Bible. We mature by putting these lessons into practice in our everyday lives. That is the attitude we must develop for life.

#### A. LOOKING AHEAD (V. 1)

Verse 1 in chapter 6 reminds us that we are to look ahead. We should anticipate growth. This is the maturation process. All of us have to grow up intellectually, socially, and physically. When babies are born, we expect them to grow up. We expect them to gain more and more skills as they grow. They develop their intellects. They develop their physical bodies. They develop their social and living skills. If they do not grow in these areas then something is wrong.

In our spiritual journeys, we grow in two ways. First, we grow in knowledge. Through reading the Bible, studying the Bible, and coming to church, we learn more about who God is, who we are in Him, and what He expects from us. Secondly, we grow behaviorally. As we grow in Christ we become more and more like Him. In other words, as we grow up, we become more Christ like.

That is the attitude we are seeking. Each day we wake up, we should anticipate learning something new about God and each day we should anticipate becoming more Christ like.

One of the main purposes of our lives is to become more Christ like. Again, let me point out that since none of us are perfect, none of us has arrived at our final destination. We must keep moving forward.

#### B. QUIT LOOKING BACK (V. 2)

The second half of verse 1 and 2 encourages us to quit looking back. One of the consequences of not growing is that we actually end up going backwards. In our physical bodies, if we quit using our muscles, they atrophy. There is no such thing as standing still in our Christian walk. If we are not growing, then we are dying. If we are not moving forward, we are moving backwards.

The author of Hebrews tells us to quit looking backwards at the elementary doctrines about Christ. He describes them in the second half of chapter 6, verse 1 as not laying the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to dead works and lack of faith in God. In other words, we need to grow up in our relationship with God. Many Christians are confused about their relationship with God. Dead works can sometimes mean those things that we used to do like being selfish, immoral, godless, loveless, filthy, and perverted. We are to leave that type of lifestyle behind. Immature Christians try to make some imaginary line that would define these sins. Then they live their lives trying to get as close to the line without actually crossing it. That has nothing to do with love for God.

However, they do have this legalistic approach in common with many other types of church people. There are other dead works from which we need to repent. These types are a little more difficult to understand because sometimes they look holy and righteous. Many people are doing a lot of good works because of their pride, their self-righteousness, and the influence of cultures, and some are trying to earn their salvation through their good works.

These people tend to give themselves away though, because there is no joy in them.

Salvation by faith is a basic issue and, we should not have to keep preaching this. There should be no confusion in our minds. Salvation is a free gift from God. All we can do is receive it.

What are some of the ways we can grow up in our relationship with God? Mature Christians do good works out of their heartfelt love towards God and others. This is the key to maturity. Mature believers work from a perspective of grace, love, and humility -- not fear, judgment, self-righteousness, and pride. We grow up in our relationship with God by studying and meditating on Scripture, by placing ourselves in God's presence through prayer, worship, and by living our lives in response to Him.

Next, we have to grow up in our relationship with each other. That is what verse 2 is all about. Baptism and the laying on of hands are ceremonies that publicly admit people into the family of faith. But again, that is simply initiation. Growing to maturity in the community means that we recognize that we are part of the body of Christ and that the Holy Spirit gave us each a spiritual gift. Mature believers search out and identify their spiritual gifts, and then they find opportunities in the community to use them. We call this ministry, and we will talk about that as a purpose in two weeks. In terms of discipleship and growth, if you have not yet identified your spiritual gift and if you are not using your gift, then you are still an infant in your spiritual walk.

But stay with me! Not only do mature believers use their spiritual gifts, they use them in a mature way. That means we should exercise our gifts with love. There are many gifted people who do a lot of good things in church, but then ruin it by their attitudes. Many adults in church still act like babies. They argue, criticize, fight, are sarcastic, find fault, and are

generally negative. So you can see, you can be using your spiritual gift and still be a baby. Growing up in our relationship to each other requires that we serve the community in love. It means that we search out our spiritual gifts and exercise them in love.

In addition to maturing in our relationships with God and with one another, the second half of verse 2 encourages us to grow up in our relationship to life. We must have a mature outlook on what to expect and how to live our lives. This is what the author means when he talks about the doctrines of the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. The Sadducees used to teach that there was no resurrection of the dead. These early Christians had to be reminded that there was a resurrection of the dead and Christ will execute the final judgment.

We need to hold these two thoughts in mind in order to help us live as grown-ups in the world. We need to remember that death could come at any time or that Christ could return at any time. Ask yourself this several times during the day, "If Christ were to come back right now to take me home, how would I feel if He saw me doing or saying this?"

Let me give you an example. Most husband and wife arguments are about petty things and they are stupid. What if, in the middle of one of these stupid arguments, Christ came back and raptured both husband and wife in the middle of the argument? As they were going up to heaven looking at each other, knowing they were about to stand in the presence of Jesus, wouldn't they feel stupid and embarrassed?

There are two problems with continually going back to the past. We will focus on our failures, and get stuck in guilt and shame. All our energy will be spent there and we will have no energy to do what God calls us to do today. On the other hand, if we focus on our successes, we can become proud and arrogant. We may think that we have somehow already arrived. What we do at this point is stop moving forward.

C. AVANTI! SEMPRE AVANTI! (V.3)

I love this saying the Italians have. They say, "Avanti! Sempre Avanti!" It is the kind of sentiment found in verse 3. It means, "Forward! Always ahead!" In other words, don't look back, and keep your eyes focused ahead. God says that His desire is for us is to conform us to the image of His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. And, as we are conformed to the image of Jesus, we are to continue to help others find salvation and grow in their faith. God permitting, we here at Devon will do so. We are commanded to grow. As I mentioned before:

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III. EXPECTED TO BECOME MATURE DISCIPLES

**IF CHRIST'S COMMAND IS TO MAKE DISCIPLES, THEN FIRST WE MUST BECOME DISCIPLES. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN GROWTH IN CHRIST.**

Now, we come to the time when we must make a decision. God's will for us is to become mature disciples. **IF CHRIST'S COMMAND IS TO MAKE DISCIPLES, THEN WE MUST FIRST BECOME DISCIPLES. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN GROWTH IN CHRIST.**

A. BEING DISCIPLED

The first step is to commit our selves to being discipled. This is something that is very important to me. I see a spiritual director, and he continues to challenge me to grow in my relationship with Jesus.

Here at Devon Church we have many opportunities to be discipled in many different areas. We have small groups. We have Friday night prayer meetings. We have Sunday

morning worship. We have many people who are trained to do one-to-one discipleship. I know Henry's group is preparing a variety of different venues for discipleship. That is my gift and my passion as a pastor. We are a church that has many opportunities for discipleship and I would encourage you to take advantage of them. We all have something to learn. Let me plug this one more time. Starting on February 25 of 2004 we will be going through these 5 purposes of a purpose driven life as a church. We will spend the entire Lenten season on this topic. We are going to take a three-fold run at it. On each Sunday, I will preach on one of the purposes. Once a week, you will have the opportunity to meet in a small group and discuss that purpose, and, each day, you will be reading from your devotional. Each week will be dedicated to a purpose. So order your books by signing up on the sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall.

#### B. DISCIPLINING OTHERS

Once we gain all this information, and once we are discipled, this will help us to disciple others. We are all called on to be ministers. It is our desire at Devon Church that each person find his or her place in ministry. So next year's family camp will be dedicated to helping you discover your gifts for ministry. Mark these dates down on your calendar. July 22-25 will be the dates for our Devon Church family camp. It will be exciting. We will have sessions on discovering your personality type, discovering your spiritual gifts, reflecting on your passions and your life experiences. It will be a time in which you can hear God speak to you about helping others grow in their faith.

Let me sum this up. Healthy Christians and mature Christians are always being discipled and discipling others. Keep this in mind. **IF CHRIST'S COMMAND IS TO MAKE DISCIPLES, THEN FIRST WE MUST BECOME DISCIPLES. WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN GROWTH IN CHRIST.**

This morning we have discussed purpose number 3. God desires that each one of us grow up to be mature believers. **JESUS' COMMAND TO MAKE DISCIPLES WAS NOT A SUGGESTION. IT WAS A COMMAND. WE ARE NOT ONLY TO LEAD PEOPLE TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST; WE ARE TO HELP PEOPLE MATURE IN THEIR WALK WITH HIM. IN ORDER TO HELP PEOPLE MATURE IN THEIR FAITH, WE MUST FIRST BECOME MATURE OURSELVES.**

The danger of not growing to maturity is that we somehow forget our purpose and our identity. Listen to this story that Ted Engstrom tells in his book The Pursuit of Excellence:

**"An American Indian tells about a brave who found an eagle's egg and put it into the nest of a prairie chicken. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them. All his life, the changeling eagle, thinking he was a prairie chicken, did what the prairie chickens did. He scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat. He clucked and cackled. And he flew in a brief thrashing of wings and flurry of feathers no more than a few feet off the ground. After all, that's how prairie chickens were supposed to fly. Years passed. And the changeling eagle grew very old. One day, he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. Hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, it soared with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings. "What a beautiful bird!" said the changeling eagle to his neighbor. "What is it?" "That's an eagle - the chief of the birds," the neighbor clucked. "But don't give it a second thought. You could never be like him." So the changeling eagle never gave it another thought. And it died still thinking it was only a prairie chicken."**

Listen! God created you for great things. He created us for worship, for evangelism, for fellowship, and for ministry. But He requires us to grow and to mature in faith. We must take discipleship seriously, lest we forget we were created for great things.