

How We Make Disciples: Reviewing the Three C's Series

Jesus Transforming Character

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Jesus Transforming Character

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Character Crisis

1. When I was in college, I did a six-month internship in my junior year. As a ministry major, the school wanted us to get a glimpse of what real ministry was like so we could make a better decision as to whether we wanted to commit to a life of ministry. Since this occurred during our junior year, if people discovered during their internship that ministry wasn't for them, they still had time to adjust their major and graduate on time.
2. During my internship I had an enlightening situation. The person I worked for directly has some gaps in their character which became noticeable. I was able to observe him in a variety of settings and watched how his character influenced how he responded to situations and how he conducted his ministry.
3. At the same time, I also had the opportunity to observe a very godly person who oversaw the entire ministry. I couldn't contrast his character, responses, and behaviors compared to the person I worked for directly. This was a very educational experience. I learned a lot about what godly character should look like and what happens when that character is lacking. I was able to compare a good example with a poor example in real time. I saw how some difficulties could be avoided with godly character.

B. When the life and ministry of Jesus is examined carefully, his strong emphasis on character and the heart will come into focus. From Jesus' perspective, the most important elements of the Christian life happen inside a person. If the inside of the cup and dish is not clean, the outside won't be clean either (Mt. 23:26). That which pollutes our lives comes from within (Mt. 15:18-29).

C. While it is easier to see Jesus' emphasis on character, it is more challenging to notice how Jesus went about trying to influence other people's character. What disciple making strategies and techniques did Jesus use? We will be looking at four examples of how Jesus focused His disciple making ministry on the formation of godly character.

II. Transforming Character in the Expose Stage

- A. As with convictions, the second C of character, is at the center of Jesus' disciple making strategy. Jesus intentionally focused attention on developing godly character into the people He encountered. Jesus met people where they were in life and sought to help them build the type of character that is pleasing to God. Since the various people Jesus interacted with were found in different spiritual conditions at distinct levels of spiritual growth, the way Jesus went about helping others transform their character varied greatly.
- B. The Christian spiritual journey begins when people first start to learn about who Jesus is. At Community Alliance Church, we call this the Expose stage of the Christian life. One of the disciple making strategies used by Jesus during this season of soul development was to help those around Him start to develop an eternal perspective so they might properly understand

what is truly valuable and important. One example of Jesus shaping people’s character is when He points out the negative consequences of people’s current lifestyles and values. As we discovered in the last message, a central component of character (according to Jesus) is the affections of our heart (what we value).

- C. Jesus entered the current value system of those who hadn’t yet believed in Him and gave a clear picture of where their lifestyle will take them. Jesus did this with the Pharisees who were “lovers of money” (Lk. 16:14). As the Pharisees were listening to the teachings of Jesus, they scoffed at what He was saying; they reacted with contempt, criticism, and ridicule. Jesus responded by stating that God does not value the same type of things that humans value (Lk. 16:15). What humanity in general values as important and holds in high regard is detestable to God. Jesus is saying humans, when left to themselves, value the wrong kinds of things.
- D. Following this statement, Jesus tells a true to life story to further explain what He means:
- ¹⁹ Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. ²⁰ And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, ²¹ and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. ²² Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ And he cried out and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.” (Lk. 16:19-24)
- E. Jesus describes the current lifestyle and values of the Pharisees through the “rich man” of His story. This rich man was successfully living the kind of life the Pharisees sought after and enjoyed. This life was lived “in splendor every day” (v. 19). This lavish living included expensive high-end clothing (“he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen” v. 19). In other words, the rich man consistently lived in luxury due to his wealth. He was so busy enjoying his life that he didn’t bother helping other people around him who were suffering. This lifestyle is the American dream in a nutshell. Jesus knows this is the way most people want to live their lives, apart from God. There are probably a number of people listening to Jesus, thinking, “that is the kind of life I only wish I had.” Jesus presents this rich man as perfectly content and satisfied with his lifestyle. Nothing negative is presented about the rich man’s way of life except his lack of compassion for the poor man Lazarus.
- F. The rich man’s enjoyment of life eventually came to an end when he died (v. 22). Once dead, the rich man’s condition changed drastically when he went to the place of the wicked dead, “In Hades” (v. 23). Jesus now presents the result of the lifestyle and value system of the rich man. While the rich man did get to enjoy a nice life due to his wealth, that enjoyment was only temporary, and his lifestyle turned out very poorly in the long run. This rich man was now “in torment” (v. 23), a long way away from the blessing of God (“saw Abraham far away” v. 23), and he was “in agony in this flame” (v. 24). The rich man longed for a drop of water to cool of

his mouth. Even the smallest comforts were taken away from the rich man. No mercy is given to him, and He is told his situation is unchangeable—he can't get out (Lk. 16:26).

- G. Jesus was encouraging the Pharisees to change their values. They loved money and the enjoyment of life that came with it. Jesus pointed out the problems of such a value system considering the big picture of eternity. The rich man is presented as regretting his lifestyle choices once he began to experience their consequences after death, as He wanted to prevent his brothers from coming to the same place (Lk. 16:27-28). The rich man appears to not value money the way he once did. The disciple making strategy Jesus used to develop the character of the Pharisees was to point out the negative consequences of their current value system.¹ Some people may think they are okay, even when this is their objective in life, because they consider themselves believers in God. But remember, Jesus is speaking this to the Pharisees, who also thought they believed in God, too. If a person's main goal in life is to live as comfortably as possible and accumulate as much wealth as they can, they are in danger of hell. This isn't a scare tactic; it is a warning based on fact.
- H. As followers of Jesus go about making disciples, we can use the same strategy Jesus used to encourage people who do not yet believe in Jesus to change their character. We can point out how they are valuing the wrong priorities compared to what really matters with the hope that they will come to understand their need to ask for God's help to change their character.

III. Transforming Character in the Educate Stage

- A. Once a person comes to trust the wisdom and reliability of Jesus, they move from the Expose stage of discipleship to the Educate stage. In the Educate stage of the Christian life, individuals learn what it means to live the way Jesus teaches. At this stage, we see Jesus once again meeting people in their current condition and helping them take their next step in spiritual growth. Jesus influences disciple's character by using the character and promises of God to move the disciples' values to the values of God.
- B. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching people how God wants them to live which is different than what they've heard from their religious leaders. Jesus is in the middle of a discussion on the nature of true righteousness that pleases God. Jesus reveals His wisdom and insight by addressing the mentality and values of most people. Jesus said each person has a choice to either live their lives for money or live their lives for God. One or the other will be the dominating force of our lives. Jesus encourages disciples to value God more than money by saying:

²⁵ For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? ²⁸ And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that

¹ Jesus used this same strategy in the story about the rich fool when responding to the man who wanted an inheritance (Lk. 12:13-21).

not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!³¹ Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.³⁴ So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Mt. 6:25-34)

- C. Jesus is impacting character by instructing people to adopt the life values they need to live the kind of life that is pleasing to God—the truly righteous life. Jesus does this by promoting two values: 1) Dependence and trust in the provision of God and 2) making God their top priority. Jesus uses the specific examples of God’s provision by using birds and flowers. He summarizes His point with, “your heavenly Father feeds them” (v. 26). Unless a person is willing to trust God’s provision for their physical necessities such as food, water, and clothing, they will be incapable of living the kind of life God wants them to live. Without adopting the value of trust in and dependence on God, a person won’t pursue God as they should or be as spiritually fruitful as God wants them to be.² Disciples are encouraged to adopt these values because “your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (v. 32). A knowledge of the character of God changes the disciples’ value system.
- D. While everyone else is running around pursuing the resources needed for their physical survival (v. 32), disciples instead should, “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (v. 33). Pursuing God and developing godly character is to be the highest priority for those who live the way God desires. Why should God’s people do this? Because God makes a promise that, for those who do, “all these things will be added to you” (v. 33). God will give what everyone else is chasing after. God’s provision can be counted on because it is reliable. Only when these two values are firmly in place can a person take the first steps in living the type of lifestyle that is pleasing to God.
- E. Jesus is making disciples by using the strategy of encouraging individuals to adopt God’s values because God is trustworthy and He has promised to take care of us. We can help others develop the character God provides by helping others understand the character and promises of God, along with their benefits. It is important to help people develop the character they need to live the type of life God requires. If a person doesn’t trust God, they won’t be able to even take the first few steps in the Christian life.

IV. Transforming Character in the Equip Stage

- A. When a person is taught enough about the teachings of Jesus so that they properly understand the lifestyle promoted by Jesus, they enter the third stage of the Jesus journey. We call this the Equip stage. When disciples have a clear picture of how Jesus lived, they need to be trained to have the skills necessary to carry out that type of life themselves. In this stage of discipleship,

² Matthew 13:22

Jesus transforms character through motivation as He continually referred to the rewards given by God for faithfulness.

- B. While Jesus had a lot to say about rewards, one example occurs following a statement by Peter about what it has cost the disciples to follow Jesus:

²⁷ Then Peter said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” ²⁸ And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first.”
(Mt. 19:27-30)

- C. In a similar way to the Expose stage, Jesus highlights the positive consequences of adopting the values of God. Jesus is giving a list of advantages for those who have sacrificed and decided to follow Jesus, “you who have followed Me” (v. 28). First on this list is, “in the regeneration...you also shall sit upon twelve thrones” (v. 28). While Jesus personalizes the first benefit of following Him to the twelve apostles, the principle He emphasizes will be broadly true of God’s people (Mt. 25:14-30). While disciples today may not have thrones to sit on, their faithfulness could result in them being given an important position and role in eternity. In essence, Jesus is promising positions of authority on the new earth for eternity, even possibly being in charge of multiple cities. Faithful disciples will be the mayors, governors, and presidents of the new earth. This is part of what heavenly rewards refer to—positions of significance.
- D. The second benefit of sacrificing for Jesus is that God blesses us with more than He asks us to give up (“everyone who has left houses or brothers...father or mother...or farms...will receive many times as much” v. 29). Luke adds that these benefits are immediate—during this life on earth (Lk. 18:30). God rewards us in greater ways in this life than the physical wealth or relationship we give up. God may reward a faithful disciple with a depth of joy for an important relationship they had to let go of, for example. Jesus doesn’t say, “if we give \$50, God will reward us with \$100.” Most of the immediate rewards of the kingdom of God are not physical or financial. The history of the church and the common experiences of most disciples bear this out. The blessed life is not always a life of wealth and prosperity.
- E. The third benefit on Jesus’s list of rewards is, “will inherit eternal life” (v. 29). Salvation in the form of inheriting the kingdom of God will be given to us. Disciples will benefit by experiencing the wedding feast of the lamb (the initiation celebration of the kingdom of God) and get to enjoy His presence and benefits for all eternity. They will get to live on the new, uncorrupted earth without pain or death. Jesus lists three different sets of advantages given to those who make personal sacrifices for Jesus: immediate rewards, heavenly rewards, and salvation. That’s a pretty good benefits package!
- F. Jesus impacted other people’s character using the disciple making strategy of highlighting the benefits of doing what God wants. Those who follow Jesus’s ministry methods can do the same. This becomes even more persuasive when they speak from personal experience.

V. Transforming Character in the Engage Stage

- A. When a person becomes experienced in the life of following Jesus, they reach a point when they are prepared to help others move through the same process. This is called the Engage stage. Here, disciples are equipped and ready to spiritually invest in the lives of others in effective ways so they can bear lasting kingdom fruit. They impact others for Jesus.
- B. When Jesus is making disciples in this stage of soul growth, He strongly encourages them to stay the course, even when the work gets difficult. He encourages disciples by telling them they play a critical role in the plan of God as His kingdom spreads throughout the world. Jesus teaches His disciples about the importance of faithfulness and perseverance as He emphasizes the necessity of being strong until the end—not even wanting the disciples to give in at death. He wants the disciples prepared to face the difficulties ahead of them.
- C. In one case, Jesus explains why the disciples should keep sharing His message with others, even when they are threatened with or experience persecution. The easier path would be to stop communicating the message of Jesus to avoid the difficulties that come along with it. However, that's not what Jesus says:

¹⁴ Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵ Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.
(Mt. 10:14-15)
- D. Jesus explains how important the message is that the disciples are carrying. While it would be easy to think the power and authority lies with those who oppose the disciples (and in a sense that is true), ultimately, the highest and most important authority is on the disciples' side. Jesus wants His disciples to have a proper perspective on their situation so He tells them, "whoever does not...heed your words" (v. 14) will face serious consequences for their negative reaction to the message the disciples carry. The fate of people who reject the disciples "will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment" (v. 15). The disciples are sharing the very message that will determine what happens to people on judgment day—the day God has set to have all humanity become morally accountable to Him. Those who reject the disciples' message will be worse off than some of the worst sinners of the Old Testament. They were so bad God specifically intervened to punish and kill them.
- E. Why is the message the disciples share so important? Because it is the means by which individuals either accept or reject Jesus Himself ("¹⁶ The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me." Lk. 10:16). When people reject the message the disciples share, they also reject both Jesus and God the Father. To reject the disciples' message is to reject God Himself; that is why a person's response to the Christian message is so important.
- F. The disciples should keep communicating the message of God, even in the most difficult of circumstances, because God is on their side, and they are doing a critically important job—one that will affect people for eternity. Knowing all this should motivate the disciples to keep going, even when it is hard. Even when they are threatened. Even when they must flee to other areas. Do you and I have as high a view of the message we carry as Jesus does?

G. Disciples can follow Jesus' example by encouraging and supporting those who are actively doing kingdom work through the discipling of those around them. It is a very difficult and dangerous job. It is good to remind one another about how important the work of the church is. It is good to encourage those who are facing various challenges because of their faithfulness to Jesus. It is good to strengthen and prepare others to join in this dangerous work. Disciples should expect to experience the same kind of treatment Jesus did from those who are opposed to God when they are faithful.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Jesus used different disciple making strategies when individuals were at different points along the Christian life growth process. Jesus met each person right where they were at and gave them what they needed to take the next step in their progression. He did this by emphasizing both convictions and character.
- B. Regarding character, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Mt. 5:6). Even the desire for godly character will be rewarded. So, too, will the active pursuit of it. Developing Jesus-patterned character is a central component to the Christian life, as revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus.

VII. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Have you ever noticed Jesus' strong emphasis on character before? If so, what have you observed about the way Jesus made disciples in this area?
- B. What can we learn about the expectations Jesus has for people's character according to Matthew 5:38-48?
- C. What excuses might someone use to rationalize their failure to develop the type of character Jesus expects? How can we be encouraged by Ephesians 3:20?
- D. What happens when people have good character according to Mt. 12:33-37?
- E. What disciple making strategy might you use to help a new Christian who is struggling with worldly pursuits while trying to hold onto Jesus too?