

### ***Overview and background to help you, as Leaders, understand this series***

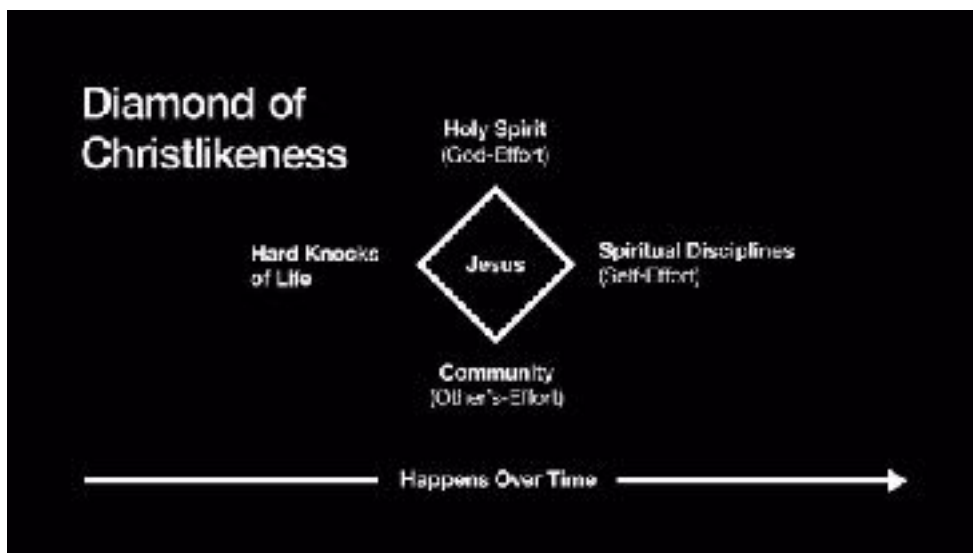
Over the coming 5 weeks we will be considering what it is to be a disciple. The word “disciple” is used 269 times in the New Testament and only two of these instances have a verb attached. The emphasis is clearly that a “disciple” of Jesus is primarily something you become. However, the most common language used within our church tradition is to “believe in Jesus” or, more simply, to “become a believer”. This is clearly deficient - the goal is not just to believe in Jesus, but to become like him. This is something that requires considerable effort.

Within Protestantism and reformed theology there can be an aversion to any concept of self-effort. The gift of the reformation established the fundamental truth that we are saved by grace alone with no human effort. However, an anaemic version of this theology can position Jesus purely as a Saviour and not as a Rabbi. We can settle for believing in Jesus for our salvation, but not following him for our sanctification. However, both are essential. In the words of Dallas Willard ***‘grace is not opposed to effort but opposed to earning’***. (See appendix at the end - Dallas Willard article on Discipleship from Christianity Today, October 10, 1980. Helpful to read through the article to get your brain into gear for the series!)

In this series we want to look again at how we become disciples and how we are spiritually formed, building on our recent series through the book of James where we explored Christian maturity.

Bridgetown use a helpful framework of four aspects of spiritual formation:

- 1) **God’s Effort** - the ongoing work of God as the ‘author and perfecter of our faith’
- 2) **Self Effort** - Holy habits and spiritual disciplines that create Godliness in us
- 3) **Others Effort** - The refining work of the community in helping us become like Jesus
- 4) **Hard Knocks of Life** - The way that hardship and trials hold a unique place for developing character and hope in us.



We will take four weeks to look at & explore each of these aspects of sanctification/formation. In the fifth week we will shift the focus and look at an amazing new resource to help us disciple others - Safar. A major new initiative from Elam Ministries, the goal of Safar is to help people fulfil the great commission and learn how to disciple others. <https://www.safar.org>

Our hope is that Safar will equip everyone with a simple tool to allow them to feel empowered to take people on a discipleship journey, with structured bible study resources that lead them through the main tenets of the Christian faith.

(c) Emmaus Road Church

***Session One - Introduction / God's Effort******16th January*****1. Reflect back**

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share, briefly, any examples or encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

**2. Review the teaching**

*"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" Hebrews 12:2*

*"Come and follow me" Matthew 4:19*

Offer: an overview of the series. Introduce the four areas (God's effort, Self effort, Other's effort, Hard knocks of life) as fundamental to spiritual formation.

Consider: How we are called to be disciples as an identity before seeing discipleship as an action? It is a posture of both heart and life rather than a list of to-do's?

Touch on the fact that we can, sometimes subconsciously, focus solely on Jesus as a saviour and not a teacher. However, Jesus' primary command was to come and follow him. The same invitation stands before each of us today. Just as with the disciples, this is a total re-orientation of our entire lives to learn from Jesus.

The basic methodology of a disciple was simple:

- 1) Be with the rabbi. Immerse yourself with them 24-7
- 2) Learn their worldview, their teachings, their mindset (biblical language: their yoke!)
- 3) Imitate them
- 4) Carry on their work in the world
- 5) Teach others to do the same

The dust on your tunic was a sign of your discipleship because of how close you followed behind the rabbi, who would kick dust up as they walked.

You may find Dallas Willard's quote helpful here - *'grace isn't opposed to effort but to earning'*. Becoming a true disciple requires considerable effort as we 'come, and follow him'.

You will also want to touch on God's effort in this session and the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification and leading into truth (2 Thes 2:13; Eph 1:13; Gal 2:20 etc)

**3. Realise the value**

- How do I see Jesus? As a Saviour, a Teacher, or....?
- Am I a believer or a disciple? What makes the difference?
- What one thing will I do differently this week in light of what I've learned today?