

# MBC MEN'S STUDY: LEADERSHIP 4

## Class 4 - Ecclesiology: *What is proactive discipleship in the church?*

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### PURPOSE OF THIS CLASS

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- While the focus of this class is going to be discipleship, it is going to be a little different. We will talk about some of the specifics of the book that you read, but I also want to introduce you to another good resource.
- *Proactive Discipleship: A Guide Teaching People How To Think Biblically* by Daron Roberts.
- This resource is short, straight shooting and very practical.

### INTRODUCTION

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- When someone says *discipleship*, what comes to mind? A strict, multi-week study through a book or a Bible study through one of the books of the Bible? Maybe it conjures up ideas of meeting one on one at a predetermined time. These things *are* discipleship, but I believe there is more that we should be doing. Whatever your view of discipleship is, I hope to help frame it in a more Biblical way and pattern.
- Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19** “Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- The only actual command in these verses is *make disciples*, this is the imperative verb that Jesus uses to stress the importance of what He was saying. The baptizing and teaching are participles which support the main idea of going and making disciples. They represent the *how* one is to make disciples.
- We know that every Christian is called to a ministry of discipleship. Each of us should have someone who is discipling us *and* someone that we, in turn, are discipling.
- This can look different for each person. If you have a family, the husband/wife relationship should be one of discipleship.
- If you have kids, they too need to be disciplined by their parents. If you are single, you should be not only preparing yourself by proper reading and training, but also finding others to have a discipleship relationship with.
- The Bible speaks to every season of a believer's life and the responsibilities they have within the church.

## PROACTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

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- This is where we come to the idea of *proactive discipleship*. As is pointed out<sup>1</sup>, there are two ways in which we commonly think of discipleship: **reactive** and **proactive**.
  - Most likely you have been involved in reactive discipleship if you have been in church for any length of time. While helpful, reactive discipleship is based upon a need more than establishing a way of life.
  - For example, reactive discipleship gives good counsel for the problem at hand. It also waits for opportunities to arise and problems to come.
  - Those who practice reactive discipleship do so with love and care, they pray for the person and usually dedicate their time together to a limited scope within the issue at hand.
- To contrast proactive with reactive discipleship, proactive discipleship does all that reactive does but then *proactively* moves into people to invest into their life. They desire to strive alongside someone, giving their own life as an example to be followed.
  - Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 "For you yourselves know, brethren, *that our coming to you* was not in vain, but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, *we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God* amid much opposition. For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. *For we never came with flattering speech*, as you know, *nor with a pretext for greed--*God is witness--*nor did we seek glory from men*, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. But *we proved to be gentle among you*, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. *Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased* to impart to you *not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us*. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, *how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers*; just as you know how *we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*"

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<sup>1</sup> *Proactive Discipleship*, p. 2

- Let's take this apart to get a feel for what Paul and his companions did in order to make sure the believers at Thessalonica were walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.
- They **went** to the people at Thessalonica. This is proactive discipleship.
- They **were bold**, not in their own talents but in the gospel of God.
- They did not try and sound smart or like the culture. They **did not try and impress** the people.
- They **proved themselves** among the people they were trying to reach.
- They **loved them**, so much so that they not only gave them the gospel but also their very lives. The people there had become so dear to Paul and his companions.
- Paul and his companions **behaved** in such a way that they could then use their own behavior as an example as how to walk pleasing to the Lord.
- They exhorted, encouraged and implored the people, **in a loving way**.
- They had a specific purpose; to get the lives of the people in line with what the Lord desires.
- This is proactive discipleship from beginning (gospel message for salvation) to the end (the word of God for sanctification).
- Read what Paul says in **2 Timothy 3:14-17** “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
- What do we see about the use and power of the Scriptures?
  - **Verses 14-15** ...*the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith...*
  - **Verses 16-17** ...*all scripture is inspired...so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*
- When we go outside the Scriptures for salvation or sanctification we are now operating under our own power at best and demonic power at worst.
- Looking at **Romans 15:14** “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and **able also to admonish one another.**”
  - Notice here Paul uses the word **νουθετέω** (to put in mind, to caution or reprove gently:—admonish, warn). This is proactive discipleship. This is not a passive verb, but one that is already assuming an action from those whom Paul is writing...**namely the church.**

- Technically, this is an infinitive verb that Paul uses, and it is there to complete the thought of what Christians in the church are able to do *because* they are full of goodness and filled with all knowledge.
- The word **νοουθετέω** is not used much in the NT.
- Acts 20:31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease **to admonish** each one with tears.”
- Romans 15:14 “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also **to admonish** one another.”
- 1 Corinthians 4:14 “I do not write these things to shame you, but **to admonish** you as my beloved children.”
- Colossians 1:28 “We proclaim Him, **admonishing** every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”
- Colossians 3:16 “**Let** the word of Christ richly **dwelt** within you, with all wisdom teaching and **admonishing** one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
- 1 Thess. 5:12 “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and **give you instruction.**”
- 1 Thess. 5:14 “We urge you, brethren, **admonish** the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”
- 2 Thess. 3:15 “Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but **admonish** him as a brother.”
- I am showing you these so that you will know that Paul not only was proactive in his discipleship, but **he also fully expected those in the church to be as well.**
- We are expected to pursue and invest in others in the church. “You don’t selfishly hang back when you see opportunities to be spent for another soul.”<sup>2</sup>
- Now that we can clearly see what is expected from us in Scripture, lets look at some of the very practical steps that we can make in order to invest in people at a much more complete level<sup>3</sup>. My goal is to really bring to bear on us what Paul did in Thessalonica with the church.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Parts of this list taken from p. 2

## WHY SHOULD WE DISCIPLE?

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### For your own joy

- Philippians 1:3-5 “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always *offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all*, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.”
- Philippians 2:1-2 “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, *make my joy complete* by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”
- Philippians 4:1 “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, *my joy and crown*, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”
- Romans 16:19 “For the report of your obedience has reached to all; *therefore I am rejoicing over you*, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.”
- 2 Corinthians 7:4 “Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; *I am overflowing with joy* in all our affliction.”
- 2 Corinthians 7:15-16 “His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. *I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.*”
- 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? *For you are our glory and joy.*”
- 2 John 1:4 “*I was very glad [joyful]* to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father.”
- Paul and John were both filled with joy because they knew that God was doing a good work in the people who were in the churches.
- Paul had personally done the work in Philippi, Thessalonica and in Corinth, but not in Rome. Even though he had yet to go to the church in Rome, he had heard about them and was full of joy because they were obedient to the gospel.
- Paul faced many hardships, but he could look at his fruit in others and rejoice knowing that the work he had done for the Lord was not in vain.
- It was not all joyous and fruitful work for Paul.
- We sadly read about Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10 “...*for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica*; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.”
  - Demas was once a fellow worker with Paul, Philemon 1:24 “...as do Mark, Aristarchus, *Demas*, Luke, *my fellow workers.*”

- Paul had labored alongside this man, perhaps even given this man the gospel and disciplined him. But, when Paul was facing his final days before Nero, Demas ran off...loving the world more than Christ.
- Not even the apostle Paul had a perfect record when it came to discipling.
- We should not only have a desire to see others grow in the Lord but rejoice when they do. It is not selfish to desire to see someone grow in the Lord.
- **What about pride?** Can we become prideful in our discipling? Of course!
  - Just like *everything* we do, we can take it to the extreme, make it about ourselves and try and take credit for what the Lord has done.
  - Just because something can be done badly, does not mean that we should not do it. In fact, it means that we should take that much more care to make sure we are not becoming prideful.
  - Paul says he boasted in them:
  - **2 Corinthians 7:4** “Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf...”
  - Paul talks a lot of boasting in the Lord for the work that He is doing in the people. He says that all other boasting is in the flesh and James says it is arrogant (Jas. 4:16).
  - You should not be boasting in what you have done and now see the results in the person, it is what God has done ***in the person in spite of our own failings***. We desire to see the Lord work and boast in the fact that he has done it.
    - Boasting is like anything else, it is not the fact that it is done, it is how it is done which can make it sinful or not.

## **For God’s Glory**

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- List to what Jesus says here in **John 15:8** “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”
- This verse is right in the middle of Jesus explaining the vine/branch relationship. This relationship is something that we need to be careful to maintain, and we do that by discipleship.
- This is why we are discipling, *to teach people to think Biblically*. When people think biblically, they are going to act Biblically. When they act that way, then they are going to bring God glory by bearing fruit.
- God saved us, not to keep us out of hell, but to glorify Him with our life.
- We must train people to think as Paul did in **1 Corinthians 10:31** “Whether, then, you eat or drink ***or whatever you do***, do all to the glory of God.”
  - This is not a separation of the holy and secular; we do not read that in the Bible. As a believer, our whole life is on display for others and for God.
  - When we disciple people with the Word of God and they begin to think Biblically about their whole life, they bring glory to God in everything they do.

- We also read in **2 Corinthians 5:14-16** “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, *so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again* on their behalf.”
  - Once again, the idea that Paul is talking about here is how we are to live our life for the glory of God. Paul knew that by training people with the Word of God they were going to be changed from the inside out and live according to the God’s standards.

## **Because we love people**

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- Intentional and relational discipling is anything but cold and utilitarian. It is near the very essence of how God has called us to love one another within His church.
- We read in **1 John 3:16** “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”
  - We know what true love actually looks like, Christ laying down His life for us. While certainly the main reference here is to His death, it also pertains to His life.
  - Christ gave up heaven in order to live an example for us, die and then reconcile us back to the Father. This is what we are to do for others as well.
  - While you most likely will never have to give up your life for another believer in the sense of life and death. We are told to give up our own desires in this life for the sake of others.
    - **Philippians 2:3-4** “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”
  - Notice what John says here, we do it for the sake of the brethren, those whom Christ has died for.
- **John 13:35** “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
  - We show our standing before Christ by how we treat His people.
  - This *love* is not what the world considers love. This kind of love is a love of action. It is a love that proves itself by how you treat others in the church.
  - It is a love that is not afraid to offend or wound a brother for the sake of keeping them on the right path. **Proverbs 27:6** “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”
    - Once again, we are not worried about the results but the process with each other.
    - We must make sure to not steamroll over people, but we must also be careful to not allow others to live in a sinful state.
- Paul says in **Colossians 1:28-29** “We proclaim Him, *admonishing every man and teaching every man* with all wisdom, *so that we may present every man complete in Christ*. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

- He says quite a bit about his heart towards discipleship.
  - He admonishes and teaches, every man.
  - Admonish is that word *νουθετέω* that we talked about.
  - Teaching is simply giving people the truth. This is a fulfillment of the command given by Jesus in the Great Commission in **Matthew 28**.
    - “Admonishing and teaching must be done with all wisdom. This is the larger context. As discussed in chapter 2, wisdom refers to practical discernment—understanding the biblical principles for holy conduct. The consistent pattern of Paul’s ministry was to link teaching and admonishment and bring them together in the context of the general doctrinal truths of the Word. Doctrinal teaching was invariably followed by practical admonitions. That must also be the pattern for all ministries.”<sup>4</sup>
  - Notice that he says that he does this to every man.
  - Why does he do it? **So that they may present every man complete in Christ**. This is the goal of Paul’s ministry and should be our aim as well. We should desire to see men and women in the church come to maturity in Christ.
- Then in **verse 29** he gives us an insight into his strength.
  - The two words Paul uses, labor and strive, speak of working until the point of complete exhaustion. In fact, the word for strive is where we get our English word agonize.
  - No one can successfully serve the Lord without working hard.
  - If we are willing to put our time and energy into things in this world that have no eternal rewards, we should eagerly put that much more into spiritual things.
  - We all serve Christ in some capacity. We are all called to disciple, we all have the strength which Christ supplies so therefore we stand without excuse.

### **Because we love the church**

- If we love Christ, we will love His people and His church. Christ is the head of the church. The church is not perfect, but we should be striving for holiness.
- If we do not see Christ as the head of the church then we will not seek to honor Him through it.
  - **Colossians 1:18 “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”**
- We love the church, so we want to see her pure.

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<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *Colossians*, Commentary on Colossians 1:28



- Titus 2:11-14 “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to *purify for Himself a people* for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”
- It is only through discipleship that we can grow in holiness and godliness and be ready for good deeds. Jesus came into the world to gather His people, the church, and purify them.
- As the church is pure, her witness in the world becomes more and more evident. We are not to blend into the world, we are not to take on the characteristics of the world, but to be so different that we are like a city on a hill which is lit up at nighttime.
- Paul says some hard things in 1 Corinthians 5:11-12 “But actually, I wrote to you *not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral (sexually) person, or covetous (greedy), or an idolater (participant in any heathen worship), or a reviler (abusive, troublemaker), or a drunkard (those known to be around alcohol), or a swindler (extortioner or thief)--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?*”
  - This is not your average “church growth” model. Look at what Paul is advocating here, there should be no one in the church, who is claiming to be born again, who is immoral, covetous, an idolater, a reviler, drunkard or swindler.
  - We are not to have any fellowship with them, not even eating with them.
  - Why? Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”
    - The people who are practicing such things are not going to heaven, they show themselves to be slaves of sin and Satan.
- **How does this relate to discipleship in the church?** We need to be able to judge people who are in the church and properly exhort them for the purity of the church.
- This means that if you see someone stuck in these sins, you exhort them as a brother. If they are obstinate and do not want to change, it is not about discipleship at that point but making sure they know they are not saved. Then **Matthew 18** and church discipline would be looked at.
- This is also what Paul had in mind in Galatians 6:1 “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”

- We do go to them because we love them and the church. But, we ourselves must be careful because we can call into the same temptation and sin they are caught in.

### **Because we do not have every spiritual gift**

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- We seek out people to disciple because we need others to balance our life as well.
- **1 Corinthians 7 & 12** “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”
  - Each person has gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to them. We do not individually possess them all but need to be together with one another in order to know our own weaknesses and lack.
  - We all have blind spots in our own life that we need others to help keep in check.
  - When we are rooted in our local church, discipling other members, we have the opportunity to not only help others grow but also ourselves.
- As we are growing together, we are then glorifying God. You have spiritual gifts in order to edify one another. We read in **1 Corinthians 14:12** “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.”
  - God has uniquely placed you here in the body, as well as everyone else. He has given you gifts that others do not have and gifted others with gifts that you do not have.
- Paul also says in **Romans 14:19** “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”
  - Individualistic Christianity does not exist today, nor did it exist in Bible times. Believers do not grow in isolation, because they were not meant to.
  - We live in the context of a community where each of us is expected to do the work that the Lord has not only saved us and gifted us for, but what He expects us to do as well.

## **OBJECTIONS TO DISCIPLING**

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### **Problems with Theology:**

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#### **Self-Protection:**

- They don't engage others so that won't have to be vulnerable themselves.
- If we are honest, nobody likes to be vulnerable with people they do not really know. When the discipleship relationship starts, matters of the heart are going to come to the surface.
- Perhaps there are dark secrets in your heart that you hope nobody finds out about. These are things that may be prohibiting you from growth in the Lord.

- If they keep their relationships with others at the surface level, they won't be asked questions that could expose them.
- This could be a case of un-mortified fear of man:
  - Proverbs 29:25 “The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.”
- It also could be a selfish desire that they don't want to give up:
  - Proverbs 18:1 “He who separates himself seeks his own desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom.”
- Selfish people are not good question askers.

### **Self-absorbed:**

- They think so much about themselves that they don't care to learn about others.
- People whose minds are occupied with themselves all the time are not going to have room left in their thoughts for the needs of others.
  - Romans 12:3a “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think...”
  - If we are the most important person in our world, that is going to come out in how we desire to interact with others around us.
- Life is about them. They happily enjoy when others engage them, but they can't muster up enough humility to proactively pursue someone else.
- Nor do they ask questions they don't care about—namely, other people's needs.
  - Romans 12:16 “Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”
  - We should never think that we have arrived or that we know all that we can know.

### **Self-pity:**

- This person is self-wallowing, and because they are too busy feeling sorry for themselves and their weaknesses, they never increase in faith to learn how they can overcome their sins and help others overcome the same besetting sins.
  - Psalm 51:12-13 “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You.”
  - If we find ourselves in a place of self-wallowing, we can cry out to the Lord to restore our joy because of His great salvation. It starts with taking our eyes off of ourselves and putting them rightly on the Lord.
  - Then, as the psalmist says, you are able to help others overcome their sins.

### **These three types of people all have a Theological problem.**

- They are only thinking of themselves, not others and not God. As believers, we are called have the mind of Christ and to look out for other believers.
- As Paul says in **Philippians 2:3-4** “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”
- I want to point out what this does and does not mean. This does not mean that we let ourselves go and never do anything that is beneficial for ourselves.
- Notice what Paul says, *do not merely (only) look out for your own personal interests*. You are more than welcome to have your own personal interests, but if you put those over and above others, then you are being selfish.
- What this does mean is that the church should be taking care of each other. If we have someone in need and you can help them in that need, put your own interests aside and help them out.

**How can we practically make sure that we do not fall into these ways of thinking?**