

Being Disciples that Thrive Mateus 5:3-12

Intro: (Two plants – both alive... one that is surviving and one that is really strong and healthy). When we think of living for Jesus, what kind of disciple do we want to be? Both are alive... but both have very different qualities of life!

When Jesus first started calling men and women around him he saw two groups first there were those who looked really healthy: they were following the rules, looking spiritual, saying the right things and going through the motions... but they weren't thriving –they were just barely surviving! The other group **looked** worse. They couldn't even be bothered to pretend, they were broken and frustrated, hurt and disappointed... but Jesus saw the potential to **thrive** in them, and so he called to them. He picked up **ordinary** people and showed them how to be **extraordinary**.

In Jesus' day disciples were common. They were people who followed a teacher or leader in order to learn from them. They were responsible to learn, to live and to imitate what their teacher taught them.

The disciples that Jesus chose were ordinary people like you and I. The most famous of them, the 12 disciples came from all sorts of backgrounds and professions. We also know that there were other disciples that followed Jesus, they made up a group of at least 72 and mixed in there were a few women – like Mary Magdalene and Mary and Martha.

But how did Jesus take ordinary people and make them extraordinary disciples? To find out we're going to look at Jesus' first public sermon (Matthew 5-7) and last teaching he gave (John 15). We're going to start with John 15 but we're going to focus on Matthew.

John 15 is about abiding in Jesus/abiding in his love. That's the goal of discipleship... to abide or remain deeply in Christ. This is what Jesus wants his disciples to remember... this is the summary of all that he's taught and all that's he lived and it will culminate in his death and resurrection. It's all about love. We

learn in this chapter what love means for us and what it compels us to do (obey God, love others to the point of dying for them, and produce fruit).

But these things, quite frankly, are very hard to do (which is why Jesus ends his ministry with this chapter and doesn't start here). It is not within our nature to love anyone but ourselves. We have a tendency to obey our own desires... or at least to put our own desires first. And the things we produce are for our own use and pleasure. So how do you take women like us and transform them into disciples who love Jesus and others... into disciples who thrive?

First, what isn't going to work but what we normally try first. **Behaviour modification!** We try it first because it's the easiest. Just look at children. We often tell our children to change their behavior without ever working on the reasons behind their behavior. It's easier to tell a child to sit still and be quiet rather than work at understanding the reason for their agitation. But the reality is, only when our character is changed will our behavior truly change. If we only change our behavior but not our character we will either begin to crumble – with frustration and disappointment; or our behavior will go back to the way it was because there's nothing to sustain the change.

And so in his first public sermon in Matthew 5-7 Jesus starts teaching about the character of disciple. In order for love to be sustained (what he is talking about in John 15) we have to have a character that can carry it... a character that has very specific characteristics that are counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. But without these changes, we will never be able to remain in Christ and be the disciples he wants us to be... disciples that thrive.

Let's read Matthew 5:3-13 – the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, the section we usually refer to as the "Beatitudes". This section is about character... from v. 14 to the end of chapter 7 is how disciples who have the character of Christ live it out in the practical realities of life.

Matthew 5:3 – *Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

To be poor in Spirit is to be humble, to not worry about getting the glory, or the praise, or to receive respect for your position and not worry about your title.

Eugene Peterson explains that it's when there's simply just less of "me" which therefore makes more room for God and for others.

Interesting that the first place Jesus starts is with our pride! We can't be disciples if we are proud... if "me" is first place or if "I" am convinced that I have nothing to learn, nothing to change. Pride is what caused Satan to fall and it's also what grabbed at Adam and Eve. The first thing we need to change in our character is letting go of our pride (stop focusing on "me" and start focusing in God). This theme is repeated all throughout the NT. "Consider others better than yourselves"; "love your neighbor as yourself"; "husbands love your wife as you love yourself"... it's taking the back seat when you really want to call "shotgun". It's doing a great job, excellent work and an honourable act, and not caring at all if your name is ever mentioned!

This is hard! We have been taught that we ought to be recognized and respected for the work we do and for the people we are. We're trained to work hard to attain... but what is it that we really should be trying to attain? Jesus says those who are poor in Spirit have already attained the kingdom of God. Those who are poor in Spirit don't need to worry about being known here, they are already rewarded in heaven... they are known... by God.

Don't misunderstand, I'm not saying, and I don't think the Bible is saying, that to be successful or known or respected is wrong. But these are merely potential consequences for what we believe in and not our goal for living. Thriving disciples are those who model dedication, love and humility.

Our character will start to be modified when God is first, others are second and we are a distant third. Real humility is not thinking badly about yourself, it's thinking of yourself in the right perspective in relation to God.

The second character issue that Jesus deals with is one that we are still struggling with in our society. It's the idea that we all **deserve to be happy!** In our post-modern world "happiness" is one of the highest values there is. It is what drives our consumerism and desire for instant pleasure. We have instant everything: instant cash, instant credit (credit cards), instant loans, instant holidays, and even, sadly, instant coffee. We want things in order to feel happy, to dull the pain of the

reality of life. Drug use, alcohol abuse is on the rise, why? Just fun? I don't think so, I think it's to hide from a reality that we'd rather not face. Happiness and success are our greatest goals and we'll do just about anything to get them.

But happiness and success are not the highest goals for Jesus and those who follow him. It is of more value to Jesus that we understand how to truly mourn.

V:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

If we are honest most of us would choose happiness over suffering... I'm right there with you! But I also know that I have learned more through suffering than through the easy times. But the mourning Jesus is talking about doesn't have to do with me... it has to do with our world. And we have a lot to mourn about it in our world. There are things happening that are despicable, that are hateful, and that are deadly. We could try and numb ourselves to these things by buying a new car or a new cell phone. Or we could really look at our world and spend a little bit of time crying for what we see, hear, smell and touch. Are we brought to tears about the wars that are happening and the innocent lives being taken? Do we ache when we hear of another abandoned child. Are we heart-broken when we hear of genocide, of racism, of murder, of rape, of terrorism? Disciples have a responsibility to do what we are able to do to help. We work to turn our compassion into action... not to be activists, but to be active in meeting the needs of those around us. We need to start seeing the world as Jesus sees it... and when we do, we will be comforted... we know the end of the story! Disciples don't run from suffering, they embrace it and they mourn. They mourn the very things that sadden the heart of God.

Jesus wasn't against happiness, he just wanted to make sure that holiness came before it!

Disciples are those who are humble and who have their hearts focused where God is focused...

V. 5 - Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

All of us like to imagine every now and again that the world revolves around us... But as disciples we learn a different reality. We need to consider the needs of others, to put others first, at the very least to remember the golden rule! Whatever happened to turning the other cheek? We don't have to fight to win... we've already won. Perhaps the world doesn't value the prize but that doesn't devalue it at all.

Wars are being fought right now, and for what? To control the power of the world... but Jesus said that in the end "the meek will inherit the earth", the prize has already been awarded... the meek win! Jesus wanted to see disciples who were kind and gentle (that's what being meek means), we need disciples who lead more with their love, compassion and grace than with their yelling, posturing and muscle. Meek doesn't mean weak... it means strength under control; strength with dignity, with respect, and with submission to Christ.

Jesus doesn't let up... 3 verses in and the crowd is already shifting in their seats. This is NOT what they expected! Gone were the healings and gentle words. This message was challenging their very core beliefs. They began to understand that they either needed to change, or they needed to walk away.

But Jesus doesn't stop... there is more than needs to change.

I have two sons and I'm an equal opportunity Mom. So I asked the boys to help me with the dishes. Their response was "that's not fair, we're just kids." I gave them the look and they quickly came to the kitchen. I asked Josh to wash the dishes and Caleb to dry and then both of them put the clean dishes away. Josh quickly intervened: "that's not fair, I'm doing more Caleb by washing, he should have to put the dishes away". Caleb, on the other hand, had a different viewpoint: "that's not fair, drying is harder and I'm younger so Josh should put them away". I could take no more! "Not fair? Do you want to know what is unfair, unfair are the children who probably had to work in a sweltering factory to make those plates. Unfair are the men and women who eat off their hands because they don't even have plates. Unfair are the thousands of families who have plates but they don't have any food to put on them..." The boys just stared at me and quietly started to do dishes.

We have very funny ideas about what is fair and what is just. We want justice... for ourselves but this isn't the justice that Jesus is talking about in the next verse.

V. 6- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness which includes justice... means that we have holy dissatisfaction about what is happening in our world. We long to see things put right, we are hungry to see justice for everyone who has been wronged. It is dangerous to feel too comfortable with our world, to become numb to the injustices that are happening, or to feel helpless about doing anything. We are promised that our hunger and thirst will not only be quenched but we will be filled... with wisdom, with discernment, with creative ideas, with whatever we need to help right the wrongs.

I would be happy to leave this next one out if I could. Don't get me wrong... I like receiving it, but not always giving it.

:7 – Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

It's not easy to be merciful although all of us like to receive mercy. Our human nature wants revenge, we want the other person to suffer like we have suffered. Mercy seems so weak, like we're giving up and letting ourselves be abused. We need our hearts to be softened again to one another and to allow ourselves to think past what is convenient, expedient, and pragmatic. We need to understand that it is more powerful to show mercy than to seek revenge. Mercy is freeing while revenge imprisons us in a spiral of hate and loathing. And we, above all of people, have experienced mercy and can understand what mercy brings. It is this mercy that we desperately need to bring into every area of our society, to show hope and a future to nations who are guilty, depressed, and enslaved.

And just a quick definition check: here's the difference between grace and mercy

Grace – Getting something you do not deserve (salvation).

Mercy – Not getting something you do deserve (punishment).

Blessed are the merciful... because they'll get it back.

Now here's a little Connie trivia: I hate soap operas... But when my niece was 17 she loved a teenage soap opera called "Strawberries with Sugar". So, for her sake I tried to watch a show with her. Poor thing, I mocked the entire program... I couldn't help myself, it was all so dramatic and silly. It went something like this: Joe likes Sarah but she likes Jake who actually likes Cindy. Sarah wants to tell Jake she likes him but she's scared of Cindy so she's dating Joe to make Jake jealous. If you can follow what I just said you are better than I am! The whole concept of soap operas is that the most ridiculous scams, stunts, lies, and deceitful behaviour will get the hero or heroine what he or she wants!

It would be fine with me if these soap operas were entertainment that we merely watched and could laugh at. But what I'm seeing is that people are imitating what they see. They act as if they were characters in a poorly written script. They use the same words, the same expressions and then they wait to see if the response is the same... it's not! Life is not a soap opera. People do not respond in a pre-scripted way. You won't always get what you want, what you say and do to someone will have lasting consequences. Manipulation and schemes don't make for good relationships.

V. 8 – Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God

The pure in heart are those who are not twisted and confused and don't try and twist and confuse other people. The pure in heart are those who are honest in their relationships... saying what they mean and not playing games with each other's feelings. They are honest in their motivations for being with people and helping them, they are innocent but not naïve. They will be hurt, but they won't be discouraged.

The pure in heart are also honest with God. They don't hide behind spiritual words or actions but are honest with where they really are spiritually. They get hurt, angry, and frustrated and they tell God that. The pure in heart can see God because they don't hide from Him, they allow themselves to be examined and to be forgiven. They see God because they are ready to see Him.

Are you following Jesus' rational – first, let go of pride and we can see the needs of others around us and weep for them, see the needs and we will feel helpless, we will understand that we alone cannot do very much, we will have learned to be meek. When we have the right understanding of who we are we will also find it easier to hunger and thirst for the right things, like justice. With all of these character traits in their rightful place, we will have an easier time of showing mercy because we will have a pure heart... it doesn't come naturally, but there are less barriers now!

This next challenge to our characters is in desperate need of right now. In a world of war and hatred we need to become men and women of peace.

:9 – Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Wait a minute... aren't all Christians supposed to be called "sons of God"... yes! But true sons of God follow their father's example. Jesus Christ came to bring peace... not to bring more conflict... at least not on this level. We are supposed to be following the same pattern. It is our job to be peacemakers, on the world front yes, but also in our churches, in our families, and our work environment.

We don't always have to win an argument... it's OK, to let someone else have their way. It's never OK to tease someone because we can't control how they will interpret it, we might really hurt them and then we're back to a time of war. It's never OK **not to talk** to someone... Jesus says we're even supposed to love our enemies! Peacemakers don't avoid the issue, they deal with it, head on. They look for peace and they plan for peace and they don't give up until there is peace!

We have to first live peaceably together as Christians before we will be given the right to speak about the peace of Christ to the world. First the world wants to see us live the peace we proclaim, and then they will be open to hearing about the Prince of peace.

How do we bring peace to a world in such turmoil? And how do we do it so everyone still thinks we're a great person? How do we step in without getting stepped on? We don't!

:10 – Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for their is the kingdom of heaven.

Maybe the most popular word of our generation is... “tolerance!” We are preached at from every area of our society to be tolerant of other people’s beliefs, to not discriminate against anyone, to not be fundamental in our convictions. And so we have a world that doesn’t believe in much of anything but at the same time believes in everything so long as it’s convenient and flexible. No one can really make a firm stand because that might offend someone and appear to be intolerant... and that is the only deadly sin of this generation.

But Jesus didn’t shy away from the truth and he wanted his disciples to have the same conviction and live it out:

It would first be important to note that we are going to have to learn to live with persecution... suffering really is a part of our lives as Christians. Christ suffered and we are called to share in that suffering (Romans 8:17).

The second thing to note is that we are to suffer because of righteousness... not because we are being nasty people! Being persecuted because we are rude and hateful goes against everything Jesus lived and taught. I know that many of the things we are confronted with in our society anger and frustrate us and our natural reaction to that is to react violently against it. But then we will be persecuted for what we have said and done... and not for righteousness.

Everything we do and say must be done within the will of God. It will take careful thinking and consideration to know how to respond to the issues that surround us. And I believe we really do need to respond. This is not the time to be silent about the issues, it’s the time to speak up. We need more students in political science, we need more students in the arts and in media, students who will have a strong but gentle voice. We all need to learn to deal with these social issues wisely, intelligently, gracefully, peacefully and lovingly. And then the persecution will come... oh yes, it will come! But it will come because of righteousness not because of us!

Persecution comes in many forms. It can be physical persecution, imprisonment, ostracism, etc. It can also be like the next verse.

:11 – Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...

There are a few things that need to be mentioned here:

1. Note the grammar: Blessed are you **when**, not “if”, or “perhaps”... “when” you are persecuted. We will be persecuted and insulted.
2. “falsely say all kinds of evil against you”. You are not considered blessed when what people say about you is true! If you are lying, stealing, having an affair, misusing money, abusing your spouse or children then the evil said about you really isn’t evil... it’s more like the truth! You will only be blessed by this type of verbal attack if you are innocent of what is being said.
3. The evil that is being said against you has to do with your faith in Jesus Christ. Children always get teased in school and often that doesn’t stop when they get to adulthood. It’s unpleasant and ridiculous but it’s not what Jesus is talking about here. We are blessed when we are persecuted because of Jesus and our faith and trust in Him. In other words, Jesus is the focus of the attack, not us. We will be blessed if we withstand the attacks, stand firm through the lies and insults...why? Because great is our reward in heaven! The blessed don’t just live for today, we also live for the future hope that we have in Jesus. This world is not all there is.

How do we really thrive – just like a plant we need to have the right conditions in which to grow, and the right conditions have to do with our character – we won’t thrive until we exchange our pride for humility, our laughter for tears, our aggressiveness with meekness, our self-centredness with righteousness, our self-focused justice with mercy, our twistedness with a pure heart, our desire for battle for peace, our self-preservation with persecution.

Changing our character is what is going to make us disciples who thrive. Working through each of these verses... not just once, but many times over many years will teach and train us to become men and women who are able to do extraordinary

things in Jesus name. We may never be known here on earth but we will be known in Heaven. So here's how I think we need to move on from here.

- A. Make it practical – steps to becoming the disciple Jesus wants you to be.
 - a. Dive
 - i. Deeper into God's Word
 - ii. Deeper in their understanding of Jesus and His mission
 - b. Survive
 - i. Mediocrity and apathy
 - ii. The pull and push of the world
 - c. Arrive
 - i. Show up!
 - ii. Keeping the destination always in focus
 - d. Thrive!
 - i. Living life to the full – the abundant life
 - ii. Constantly growing
 - iii. Spread what you've learned to others