



Introduction: Have you ever been given a job for which you are seriously underqualified? The Bible is full of our job descriptions as Jesus' followers: **Matthew 5:13 & 14. 2 Corinthians 5:20. 1 Peter 2:9.** Affirm one another of these declarations and then read and consider **Philippians 2: 12 – 18**, picking out a further job description in **verses 15-16a**. Remember these verses are for us, for a lifetime. For the next 10 weeks, we are going to explore how we might be helped to step into our daunting job descriptions. Our topic is '**Intentional Discipleship**' and we're looking at it because:

- A] Our church is growing in numbers – great, but we'd like to be growing deeper as well as wider.
- B] It's not about making church attendees but about making disciples of Jesus and about maturing in Christ.

1. What do we mean by Discipleship?

- God's original plan was for us to become like Jesus: **Genesis 1: 26. Colossians 1: 15. Ephesians 4: 24.**
- We are to take on the character of Jesus: not becoming His clone but retaining our personality and selfhood.
- The journey of discipleship is one of becoming who we were made to be in the beginning: accepting who we are
- The day we become Christians, we take on a new identity as children of God, Christ's ambassadors, salt of the earth and light of the world. Discipleship is the process of learning to think, speak and do things the Jesus way.
- The Greek word for 'disciple' is best translated as 'an apprentice': someone who is employed by a master craftsman and learns on the job by listening, watching and then doing it themselves in practice.

2. What do we mean by Intentional?

- The process of becoming like Christ takes our purposeful co-operation: it doesn't happen by accident:
 - a) You don't become spiritually mature just by being a Christian for a long time.
 - b) Nor do you become spiritually mature by in-depth biblical knowledge, 50 years as a chorister or on the PCC
 - c) You don't mature as a disciple by acting the part but not engaging seriously with Jesus in your inner being.
- This does not contradict the truth of our redemption being won for us by the cross of Christ & the grace of God.
- But once we have received the free gift of God's grace, then that grace goes on working in our lives to help us to work at the things we need to do to achieve spiritual maturity, **Philippians 2: 12-13**.
 - a) 'Working out your salvation'* begins with a willingness to obey and cooperate with what the Holy Spirit wants to do in our lives to develop our character and change us to be Christlike.
 - b) Christlikeness begins to be gained both by imitating Jesus and by allowing Him to inhabit our souls, **verse 13**
 - c) So there is a balance between us striving to become like Jesus, and relying on God to enable us to become like Jesus: a balance between activity and rest. **Philippians 1: 6**

3. What do we NEED for us to embrace intentional Discipleship?

- A will to accept the cost of the changes that will accompany us being part of a GROWING community of grace.
- We need God's GRACE already within us to make us willing to desire spiritual growth.
- We have to be intentional about COMMUNITY: Isolation is not optional for the Christian who wants to grow, we need to search for authentic community where groups of people 'do life' together:
 - a) There is a cost (eg. time) but the benefits are enormous. Don't settle for less if you want to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Groups: make this season a great one! Join a small group if you are not in one!
 - b) Mine the depths of God's Word together so that you have His truth to inform, mould and shape you.
 - c) Share your sins and failings with confidential, supportive people who will challenge you, hold you to account, encourage you and love you unconditionally.

Questions for discussion

1. Do we often, or ever, think of ourselves as salt or light of the world; as an ambassadors for the King of kings?
2. What have we understood about discipleship before Ruth's sermon, and what more have we learnt about it?
3. How much of your discipleship has involved listening to the voice of Jesus, the Master Craftsman, watching Him at work in the world and doing what you see Him doing? How do we hear see and see Jesus?
4. What does spiritual fitness look like? Has it got something to do with the balance between activity and rest?
5. Are we willing to accept the cost of intentional discipleship?
6. How do we avoid our commitment to our Christian Community impacting negatively on other friendships?

Further thought: 'Work out your salvation' is not about reaching goals or obtaining merit. The Christian already possesses salvation but has a lifetime to explore and enjoy its implications ever more fully.