



Graying in Grace

Becoming
Mature
Disciples
of Jesus
Christ

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In **Psalm 71:17-18** it is written,

O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

We're never too old to grow in our relationship with the Lord and share the "Good News" of Jesus Christ, are we? Aging is a part of life, and the psalmist reminds us that God will continue to walk with us and use us to grow Christ's Kingdom. And this is done is by becoming disciples and making disciples for Jesus.

The facts are clear. America is aging at a rapid rate. Daily, 10,000 people are turning 65 years of age. By 2060 almost 100 million people in the United States will be 60 years old or more. The fastest growing population within the older realm will be those individuals 85 years and above. And then there is the church. The church is already feeling the effects of the "age wave." The average congregational member is in his or her 60s. When you walk into many of our parishes a "sea of gray" overwhelms the pews; the shouts and laughter of young children are seldom heard.

Some would surmise this is the reason the church is declining. Some would suggest that simply hiring a youth director would attract young families with children. While a possibility, this is not realistic in the majority of our congregations. We simply need to change our way of thinking. Instead of looking negatively upon an aging church, we should begin to see the possibilities for evangelism, discipleship and renewal. As the general population grows older, why can't the church use this resource to grow

“mature disciples” and bring about “vibrancy” within the life of the Body?

This is the focus of our Bible study: Assisting older adults in clinging to the faithful promises of God, and “walking alongside” those who want to grow into “mature disciples.” Because as we grow into the discipleship of Jesus Christ, we will have several opportunities to disciple others. As it is written in **Isaiah 46:3-4**:

“Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.”

Session #1 – A Disciple?

In the New Testament Book of **Ephesians 2:8-9**, the Apostle Paul writes:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

There's no doubt about it.

Through God's grace alone, through a God-given gift of faith in Jesus Christ, we're promised life forever with the Lord.

There's nothing we can do to save ourselves. We can't pay for salvation or store up enough "brownie points" to gain it. It is by God's grace, this free and undeserved gift, that we are saved through the Savior.

Through Christ's crucifixion on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, our sins have been paid. We have forgiveness! We have hope!

So, now what?

It's true that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But Jesus wants us to grow in our faith. The Savior wants us to deepen our relationship with Him.

How do we do it? By "Graying in Grace" — becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

In **Matthew 28:19-20** Jesus commands,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

What’s a disciple? The Greek word for disciple is “mathetes.” It means “pupil” or “learner.” As a disciple of Jesus, we are expected to make a commitment to Christ. We are expected to grow spiritually, reach out to others, and live our lives making other disciples in the name of Jesus.

Becoming a disciple is much different from just being a church member. A church member worships occasionally, pays dues (offerings), and is a spectator when it comes to faith. But Christ wants something different from us. When we’re “connected” with the Lord, things happen!

Please read and discuss the following Bible texts. What do they share with us about being disciples of Jesus Christ?

- **John 15:1-16**
- **Luke 10:38-42**
- **I Timothy 4:6-10**

Are we ready for the challenge? We’re never too old to become disciples, and to make disciples for Christ.

Questions for Discussion

(1) What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

(2) Does “growing in discipleship” bring you excitement or fear? Why?

(3) Why do you think it’s hard to be a disciple of Christ?

Session #2 – The Cost...

The following Scripture may not be easy to read, but Jesus reminds us that there will be a cost for following Him.

Please read and discuss **Luke 14:25-33**.

Look at some of the things Christ is saying...

“You cannot be my disciples,
unless you love Me above all things.”

“You cannot be my disciples,
unless you carry your own cross.”

“You cannot be my disciples,
unless you give up everything you have.”

Sobering words. But Jesus is laying it on the line. If we're going to be His disciples, He must come first!

We cannot let the things of this world, such as greed, possessions, control, guilt, addiction, worry, doubt, or even our own self-centeredness, become other gods. But it's hard for us not to do this, isn't it?

Please read and discuss the following texts.

- **Genesis 18:1-15**
- **Luke 1:18-25**

Even as older adults who have received wisdom through living and experiences, we still have times of doubt, fear and the lack of faith.

Jesus knows that we're imperfect and lack trust in God. We're sinners. That's why He shed His blood and died on the cross.

But as redeemed people, those bought for a price, we need to continually repent, turning away from the things that will harm us and toward the loving Savior. As King David, we are called to have “a heart for God.”

Being a disciple of Christ can be a costly thing. It may cause discomfort with family members and friends. It may cause us to be persecuted for our faith. But it will provide us great hope and joy. The Lord is calling us to “Follow Him.” Are we ready for the experience?

Please read and meditate upon these additional texts concerning the cost of discipleship.

- **Matthew 10:34-39**
- **Luke 9:57-62**

Questions for Discussion

(1) Are we willing to be disciples of Jesus even at a cost? Why or why not?

(2) What might the personal cost be to you?

(3) Why is it hard to “turn away” from the things of this world? What is holding us back?

(4) Even at a cost, what’s the promised reward for following Christ?

Session #3 – Graying Disciples: “Just Do It”

According to God’s Word, disciples of Jesus are called to do specific things.

The Marks of Discipleship

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|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Studying the Word</i> | We learn about Jesus |
| <i>Loving</i> | We change lives |
| <i>Praying</i> | We listen and grow closer to God |
| <i>Worshiping</i> | We give God thanks and praise |
| <i>Servanthood</i> | We give of ourselves to touch a life for the Lord |
| <i>Forgiving</i> | We forgive as Jesus has forgiven us |
| <i>Generosity</i> | We give as God has blessed us |
| <i>Fellowship</i> | We spend time with other believers |
| <i>Witnessing</i> | We share Jesus with others |
| <i>Ministering</i> | We share the Good News to a hurting world |
| <i>Discipling</i> | As disciples, we make disciples |

Are we ready to “Just Do It”?

Disciples... “Study the Word”

John 8:31-32 – So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Clearly, we are being compelled to read, study, and share God’s Word. Because the Word made flesh is Jesus, the Way, the

Truth, and the Life. In Holy Scripture, we literally find strength, support, hope and eternity.

Simply...

- We need to read God’s Word every day.
- We need to get involved in a small group Bible study.
- We need to teach the Word to future generations.

As written in **Deuteronomy 11:18-19**:

“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul ... teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

As “The Word” is read, we must ask ourselves some questions. Who is speaking? What is going on? What’s the message? How is God speaking to me through this Word? How am I being called to change or action?

Please read and discuss **II Timothy 3:16-17**.

Holy Scripture is inspired, literally “God breathed.” What else can the Word be used for?

Please read and share your thoughts about the following Scripture verses.

- **Psalm 119:105**
- **Isaiah 55:10-11**
- **Luke 11:27-28**
- **Colossians 3:16-17**

Questions for Discussion

(1) Why is God's Word so important?

(2) How will reading and studying the Word draw us closer to Jesus?

(3) What prevents us from reading it?

(4) How can we live and share the scriptures with others?

Session 4 – Disciples... Love

John 13:34-35 – “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Love. This is what Jesus is specifically commanding us to do in the New Testament. Please read and discuss the following Scriptures. What do they say about love?

- **Deuteronomy 6:4-8**
- **Leviticus 19:8**
- **Matthew 23:34-40**
- **Luke 6:27-36**
- **Romans 5:6-11**
- **Romans 8:11-39**
- **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**
- **Ephesians 3:17-19**
- **1 John 3:11-19**
- **1 John 4:7-21**

There's no doubt about it. We are being commanded and called to love. But loving is not always easy, is it? It's hard to love when someone uses us. It's hard to love when someone abuses us. It's hard to love when others treat us poorly because of arrogance and pride. But does this give us a license not to love? Absolutely not! Sometimes we need to love from afar. We need to give these individuals to God and ask the Lord to give us the courage and strength to love the best we can.

In the English language, there is one word for love. But in the Greek language (in which the New Testament is written), there are different words to describe diverse types of love.

Agape = “Sacrificial Love”

Philos = “Brotherly Love”

Eros = “Romantic/ Sexual Love”

Martin Luther said that we are being called to be “Christ to our neighbor.” What do you think this means in the context of love?

As we age, loving becomes even more important, as this is the legacy that we can leave to the generations to come. Right before his death, the aging leader of Israel, Joshua, had some things that he wanted to share with the Israelites.

Please read **Joshua 23**. How was Joshua sharing “the truth in love” before his death?

Questions for Discussion

(1) What kind of love is Jesus commanding us to share?

(2) What do you do when it's hard to love?

(3) How does love fit into the scheme of life?

Session 5 – Disciples... Pray

Please read and discuss **Luke 11:1-13**.

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, the Lord gave them these words:

- **Our Father, who art in heaven.**
God is our loving Father and He dwells in heaven.
- **Hallowed be Thy name.**
God's name is sacred and holy.
- **Thy Kingdom come.**
God's Kingdom of love, forgiveness, and life is coming among us (Jesus).
- **Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**
We ask God's will to be done in our lives.
- **Give us this day our daily bread.**
We ask God to supply us what need to live.
- **Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.**
As we ask God to forgive us, the Lord expects us to forgive others.
- **And lead us not into temptation**
We ask God to keep and protect us, as the devil tries to tempt/test us.

- **But deliver us from evil.**

We ask God to deliver us from all kinds of evil.

- **For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

We can be sure that God is all powerful. He hears our prayers and answers them according to his will and way.

In prayer, we communicate with God, both talking and listening. In prayer, we grow closer, into a deeper, loving, relationship with Jesus. In prayer, we experience the Lord's strength and presence. In prayer, Christ "woos" us unto Himself.

For some prayer is hard. There is a fear that the wrong words might be uttered. There is a fear that it may not be done in the "right manner." This is why some are afraid to embark on this instrument provided by God himself.

There are many ways to pray. Each person will be led by the Spirit to pray in a manner with praises and thanks to God in the name of Jesus.

Some differing prayer forms include:

- **Intercessory Prayer** – praying for the needs of others and yourself
- **Healing Prayer** – praying for the body, mind, and spirit (laying on of hands)
- **Contemplative Prayer** – quietly listening to how God is speaking to our hearts.
- **Petition Prayer** – praying written and memorized prayers

Another method of prayer is **A.C.T.S.**

A – Adoration (Praising God)

C – Confession (Confessing our sins to Jesus)

T – Thanksgiving (Thanking the Lord for ALL of our blessings)

S – Supplication (Praying for the needs of others and ourselves)

T.R.I.P. is still another way to pray, based on Martin Luther's method of praying the Holy Scriptures.

T – What in this Scripture gives you thanks?

R – What in this Scripture is causing you to repent?

I – What in this Scripture is causing you to pray for others and/or yourself?

P – What in this Scripture is calling you to plan?

Please read and discuss your thoughts on the following biblical texts:

- **Mark 1:35**
- **Mark 14:32-42**
- **Romans 8:26-27**
- **Philippians 4:6**
- **I Thessalonians 5:16-18**
- **I Timothy 2:1**

Questions for Discussion

(1) How is your prayer life?

(2) In what ways do you pray?

(3) Do you believe that God hears and answers your prayers?
Why or why not?

(4) Is it hard for you to pray? Why or why not?

Session #6 – Disciples... Worship

Please read discuss **Hebrews 10:24-25**. In this Scripture, we are reminded about the importance of worshiping, as it gives us the opportunity to encourage one another in Christ.

As growing disciples, we are being compelled to worship the living God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) on a regular basis! Through the confession of sins, prayers, singing, reading of the Word, confession of faith, and the receiving of God's grace through the sacraments, we are surrounded by God's Word, having an encounter with Christ. It makes no difference if the worship is traditional or alternative. It makes no difference if worship is done inside or outside of a building. Where it centers around the Trinity, the worship of God is happening.

Please read **Luke 2:36-38**. We are told that an older woman, a widow, a prophetess named Anna, was worshiping the Lord in the Temple. We are never too old to worship Jesus, are we? In fact, as we age, we can be an example to younger generations of the importance of worshiping God.

Through the Spirit may our hearts be opened, as we give thanks and praise to the Almighty for all His blessings!

Please read and share about the following biblical texts on “worship”:

- **Psalm 95**
- **Psalm 100**
- **Exodus 20:8-11**
- **Matthew 26:26-30**
- **Romans 10:17**
- **I Corinthians 14:26**
- **Ephesians 5:18-19**
- **Colossians 3:16**

Questions for Discussion

(1) Why do you think worship is important?

(2) How do you feel when you worship?

(3) How is Jesus made real for you in worship?

Session #7 – Disciples... Serve

Please read **II Samuel 19:31-40**.

The man's name was Barzillai. Scripture tells us that he was 80 years old when he helped King David with food and resources while David's son, Absalom, was trying to take the kingdom away from his father. Even if Barzillai thought that his age might be an impediment to serving, it certainly was not!

Do you ever feel that you are too old to serve Jesus? Or do you finally have the time in your life to serve now?

The Holy Scriptures are clearly calling us to serve. The Greek word for service is "diakonos." It can mean waiting at a table or following the will of the master. When it comes to Christ, we are most definitely following the will of the MASTER!

Please read **John 13:1-17**. What does this text teach us about Jesus' call to service?

Obviously, Christ himself is our ultimate example of serving others. In **Mark 10:45** it is written:

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Knowing that a disciple's life is a call to serve others in Jesus name, please read and discuss the following scriptures on service.

- **Matthew 25:31-46**
- **Luke 10:25-37**
- **Luke 14:7-14**

Questions for Discussion

(1) What are some ways we can serve others in Christ's name?

(2) How can we serve within the Church?

(3) How easy is it to serve others? Doesn't selfishness get in the way?

Session #8 – Disciples... Forgive

In **Matthew 6:14-15**, it is written:

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

We have forgiveness of sins through the shed blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is true. But as Christ forgives, we are also called to freely forgive others.

Sometimes forgiveness is not easy. If we've been hurt or taken advantage of, we may not want to let go. This may cause us to be angry, bitter, or even to hold a grudge. But we must understand that forgiving is not only for the person who has wronged us, but it is for me. By forgiving, it allows us to “let go” and move on with our own lives.

Please read and share your thoughts on the following scriptures focused on forgiveness.

- **Psalm 51**
- **John 8:1-11**
- **John 20:23**
- **II Corinthians 2:5-11**

Questions for Discussion

(1) Why is Christ so emphatic on us forgiving others?

(2) Why is it so hard to forgive sometimes?

(3) What happens to us when we forgive?

Session #9 – Disciples... Are Generous

As disciples of Jesus we are expected to be generous with our time, talents, and treasure. Everything we have belongs to God. We are stewards, managers of His blessings. Because of His generosity with us, we are being called to be generous with others.

Please read **Matthew 6:19-21**.

As individuals, it would be so easy just to think of ourselves and hoard possessions for our own enjoyment. But these things could easily become other gods in our lives. We are being called not to accumulate, but to share. Because the more we give the more we will receive from the Lord.

Please read and converse about the following scriptures on generosity.

- **Genesis 28:18-22**
- **Luke 21:1-4**
- **Acts 4:32-5:11**
- **I Corinthians 16:1-4**
- **II Corinthians 8:1-15**

Questions for Discussion

(1) So how can we become more generous in our living?

(2) How will this generosity help the ministry of Jesus?

(3) Is it possible to be “too generous?” Where does trust and faith come into play?

Session #10 – Disciples... Fellowship

Please read **Acts 2:42-47**.

As the believers came together in “fellowship,” they...

- Shared belongings
- Helped those in need
- Ate (with glad and humble hearts)
- Prayed

The Greek work for fellowship is “Koinonia.” It literally means, “a close mutual relationship; participation, sharing in, partnership.”

As disciples of Jesus we are expected to be in fellowship with other believers. Christianity is more than an individual faith, it’s also corporate. We come together in love, encouragement, the bearing of each other’s burdens, and in celebration with other members of the Body of Christ.

As we gather together with other believers, we realize that we’re not alone. We gain strength and support from these interactions.

Please read and meditate upon the following scriptures.

- **II Corinthians 1:3-4**
- **Galatians 6:2**
- **Philippians 2:1-11**
- **I Thessalonians 5:11**

Questions for Discussion

(1) Why do you think fellowship is important for Christians?

(2) How do you personally fellowship in your local church?

(3) What kind of fellowship ministries could your congregation be starting?

Session #11 – Disciples... Witness

Please read **Acts 1:8**.

These are Jesus' last words before He ascends into heaven, and he is giving the Church, the believers, marching orders. We are to witness Christ locally, regionally, nationally and globally. Simply, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we're called to share Jesus Christ with others. We need to share the Lord so people can be saved. We need to share the Lord so people can experience hope and healing.

“To Witness,” means to testify. To tell the truth. We can testify to how God has been active in our own personal lives. We can tell our “faith stories.”

Please read **Luke 2:22-35**. At an older age and before his death, Simeon had the opportunity to encounter the Christ Child, and witness to what Jesus would do for the world. Through the Spirit, he was thanking God and witnessing the “Good News.”

So, what's your faith story? How has Jesus touched your life?

How can we witness for Christ?

- Invite others to meet Jesus (**John 1:35-42**)
- Share our “God experiences” (**John 20:11-18**)
- Give to others, rather than judging them (**Luke 6:37-41**)

Please read and share your thoughts on the following texts.

- **Psalm 66:16**
- **Matthew 9:35-38**
- **I Corinthians 15:1-2**
- **Ephesians 4:1-3**
- **Colossians 4:5-6**
- **II Timothy 4:2**

Questions for Discussion

(1) How do you share Jesus with others? (Give examples)

(2) What excites or scares you about sharing the Lord with a family member, friend, coworker or classmate?

(3) Do you find it hard to talk about Christ? Why?

(4) How can we be an example so others will see Jesus in us?

Session #12 – Disciples... Are Ministers

Please read **1 Peter 2:9**.

Through our baptisms, we've been ordained as Christ's priests and ministers. We've been chosen, made holy by the Lord to proclaim the wonderful acts of God.

Please read **Matthew 5:14-16**.

How does this verse make you feel? Don't worry, God's Spirit is equipping us for this task.

As it is written in **Joel 2:28**,

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”

God's Spirit provides us with the “gifts and fruits” to do ministry in Jesus' name

Please read and share your thoughts on the following Scriptures.

- **Romans 12:6-8**
- **1 Corinthians 12:4-11**
- **Galatians 5:22**
- **Ephesians 4:11-12**

Questions for Discussion

(1) Do you see yourself as a minister? Why or why not?

(2) What gifts has the Spirit given you to proclaim Jesus?

(3) How are you using these gifts for ministry?

Session #13 – Disciples... Make Disciples

The goal of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is to make other disciples for the Lord.

Please read and discuss **Titus 2:1-5**.

Both older men and older women are being instructed on how to live the Christian life. And part of this call is to share the faith, and reach out to the younger generations.

Are we doing this? Are we making disciples for Christ? Why or why not?

Please read the following Psalms. What are we being compelled to do?

- **Psalm 78:4**
- **Psalm 102:18**
- **Psalm 145:4**

In disciple making we need to personally take the time with another, witness Christ, share the faith, help this person to understand the scriptures, and model what it means to live a servant life in the Lord. Since the resurrected Jesus is specifically calling us to “Go, make disciples,” this should be the most important and vital task of the church. Is there anything more exciting than helping another grow in the saving love of Christ?

Please consider the following biblical texts on “making disciples”

- **John 15:4**
- **I Corinthians 11:1**
- **I Peter 2:21**

Questions for Discussion

(1) What scares you the most about “making disciples?”

(2) When you’ve made disciples in the past, how did it go? How did you do it?

(3) Does your church concentrate on making disciples, or is it more interested in “church membership?”

(4) How must your congregation change to become more of a “discipleship making” church?

(5) Can you think of anyone right now to whom you would like to extend the invitation to discipleship?

“The End” and “The Beginning”

Throughout this study, we’ve examined what it means to “Gray in Grace,” becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

Are we ready for the adventure?

We are never too old for the task. **Proverbs 16:31** says:

Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.

Whether we look at the biblical examples of Moses, Abraham, Sarah, David, Zechariah, Elizabeth or others, God continues to use the aging for His will to be done. There is no retirement in the Bible, only re-“firement”!

Please read **Joshua 14:6-15**. Caleb, one of the original spies that Moses sent out to check on the promised land, relates that even at 85 years of age he could still be used by God! Do you feel this way?

In **John 4:35**, it is written:

“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.”

As older adults, now is the time to grow in our faith, share the faith, and make disciples for Christ. It’s true that the task will not be easy. The devil, Satan, will do everything in his power to thwart our mission.

I Peter 5:8 tells us:

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

In order to deflect the wiles of the evil one, we must go back to those things that already strengthen our discipleship.

Please read and discuss **Ephesians 6:10-18** (Armor of God).

Are we up to the challenge?

This study may be ending, but our discipleship journey with Jesus is just beginning. As we go our way, let us reflect upon these last three Scripture verses, letting them provide guidance and direction for our spiritual lives.

- **Proverbs 3:5-6**
- **Romans 10:9**
- **Romans 12:1-2**

Remember, disciples are made, not born. Let us commit ourselves to “Growing in Grace” and becoming mature disciples of Jesus, with the focus of making other disciples for the loving, saving, and hope-filled Christ. Amen.