

Bishop Bradosky's Discipleship Bible Study



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<u>Practical Information:</u> The facilitator may choose to read aloud each of Bishop Bradosky's reflections throughout the Bible Study. Alternatively, participants may take turns reading those reflection pieces aloud. Discussions questions are in bold italics type for ease of access.

<u>Supplies Needed:</u> Bible (printed or digital copy), this Bible Study (printed or digital copy), writing utensil for taking notes (or digital equivalent).

- Opening Prayer
- 2. Read Mark 11:12-17 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, 'Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.' Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.
- 3. Divide up into dyads (2 people) or triads (3 people) and process/reflect on the following questions:

	A.	bought and sold there. The similarity of these acts is striking, and I believe they are connected in symbol and message. Have you ever dealt with these texts as though they were integrated as one message? Why or why not?
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4.	turn to the land/triad.	rger group and	l share which	key reflectio	n most stood	l out to you i	n your
	using the ter changers wh God offering make? Do yo	Mark takes us inple as a busing o were making sacrifices and u see any conno like the fig tree	ness, buying a g a living off of giving offering ection yet? Is	nd selling. H of overchargings. What po	e overturned ng the peopl int do you th	l the tables of e who came t ink Mark is tr	f the money to worship rying to
	see if it is pro excuses for to may have had that Jesus is a created the force at t	be fig tree. He dillegitimate ed being unfair in a gree? Who he fig tree? Who he fig tree the court from you eat in a way that beductive and unto live not being our life? Why?	wit. But He fi writes, that is expectations his demands as the right to apacity for prover again. The t was contrainfulfilled pro- ing able to be p	nds nothing to was not the for the fig trees. But a far moset the expendencing fruite fig tree words to God's deviding nothing	but leaves. For season for five. Some who ore important ectations for the Jesu uld live but lesign and Gong for anyon	igs, suggesting read this text of the fig tree? Yes curses the figack any real parts will. It woes.	is making g that Jesus at believe s who Who has ig tree. Let ourpose. It uld remain orse to

- 5. Facilitator helps the group reflect on the following questions/thoughts:
 - A. These two pieces are part of the same message. The temple was no longer a symbol of the covenant relationship between God and His people. It was no longer about faith in God but a religious system that sought to maintain its position of power and influence controlling and manipulating people for the sake of perpetuating its own existence. The religious leaders were functioning in a cultural climate of Roman influence that was hostile and the leaders were primarily interested in their own survival, influence and financial success at the expense of the people. They were no longer good shepherds caring for the spiritual well being of God's people.

They were just like the fig tree, lots of leaves and no fruit. There were many in Jesus' day who made excuses for the religious establishment and said it just was not the right season for bearing fruit. In difficult times, let's just try to get along and remain passive so we avoid conflict with the culture and preserve whatever we have. They thought Jesus was being unfair in His criticism and expectations. In fact, they were in favor of getting rid of Jesus to preserve their own religious institution. They were no longer interested in the mission God had given them. Instead, they created a new mission, survival, preservation of a religious institution, struggling to maintain their control. They were not interested in producing fruit but making more leaves and pretending to be faithful.

The question is whose Temple is it? Who has the right to set the mission for the Church? Who has the right to hold the Church accountable? What happens if the Church forsakes its mission and its Lord and Savior?

Does any of this seem familiar? Have you experienced anything like this? Have you ever considered yourself part of the problem more than the solution?

B. You do not have to look far to find religious institutions that are more concerned about their own survival than the mission Jesus gave to His Church. You don't have to look far to find religious leaders who criticize Jesus to defend their own, values, morality and behaviors. You don't have to look far to find those who are no longer spiritual shepherds but those looking for affirmation from the culture, who no longer proclaim the Gospel of Jesus but their own wisdom and agendas, more concerned with being politically correct than leading people to Jesus.

Jesus was cursing all those things that rob the Church of the true power of God, its identity and its true mission. This is the result of what I call the over-institutionalization of the Church.

of the Church.
How would you define the over-institutionalization of the Church today?

C. Time will not permit a comprehensive history of the Church's struggle with institutionalization, but I contend that it began when Constantine, emperor of Rome, made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Constantine made the Church a state institution. From that point in time until the period of the dark ages (A.D. 1500), much of the church died. Since the Reformation in the last 500 years, we saw the renewal, revival and restoration of many truths that had been lost. Now the same Churches of the Reformation era are now falling victim to the past, the over-institutionalization of the church. Many are more concerned about their buildings, power and control, structures, organizations, committees and acceptance by the world than the mission of Jesus and producing fruit. From the time of Constantine, the church became a building. He built beautiful edifices and required Christians to attend. The buildings became theaters, the ministers became actors, the people became an audience, and the offerings were the price of admission to the show. (Christianity was the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire.) Up until that time, Christians had met in homes. The truth is that it doesn't matter where the church gathers — in a big building, a small building, a house, a garage, a barn, a tent, or under a tree. The Church is the Body of Christ. It is where the Gospel is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered. All those who believe in Jesus are temples of the living God. How do you understand the Church — not just theologically or from our confessional perspective but practically?

D. The Church is not a building and the passage also makes clear that the church is not a business. As soon as the church begins to function more like a business, that is primarily concerned with the bottom line of funding or takes on the identity of a charitable organization, concerned only with humanitarian projects, it will begin to wither and die, just as the fig tree Jesus cursed. The church, above all else, has been called to be the redemptive body of Christ at work in this world, leading people to faith in Jesus, and helping them to grow and mature in their faith so they too can bear fruit. If the devil can institutionalize it and turn into a powerless religious system, it will no longer serve the purposes of God.

Beginning with the rule of Constantine and the Roman Empire, a great distinction was made in Christianity between the clergy and the laity. This distinction shifted the personal responsibility of the individual believer to the institution and its leaders. The individuals became spectators instead of participants. The people are not an audience. This was true not only centuries ago but is true today. Christianity becomes institutionalized when a building becomes more important than the people, when money becomes more important than the Spirit's workings, when attendance takes precedence over effectiveness, and organization and structure are emphasized more than relationship.

The church is a living organism. It grows from within. Changing outward forms and structures does not add quality to the church. Spiritual quality can only be produced from the inside out.

The fig tree that Jesus cursed had leaves but no fruit. The outside looked good, but a closer inspection by Jesus exposed the tree's flaws and lack of fruit. This was the problem in the temple. It looked beautiful and unblemished on the outside but was unclean and defiled on the inside.

How do these descriptions describe the church today or the congregation where you are?

Thow do these descriptions describe the charen today of the congregation where you are:

E	The ultimate result of the over-institutionalization of the Church is that it becomes weak and ineffective like an unused muscle, that will atrophy and eventually die or only appear to be alive but becomes dead on the inside.
	Here is my encouragement to you, don't ever think this can't happen to you. We must fight against this constantly. We were formed and influenced by former church bodies who over time became over-institutionalized. Their churches are now empty. They are struggling to survive. They are losing members, their young people are not returning, they have abandoned the mission of the Church. Their resources are drying up. Their passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ is gone. Their power is not the Holy Spirit but political popularity in affirming the culture and they arm themselves with their belief that every pathway leads to salvation, declaring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be irrelevant when compared to their individual wisdom.
	They take consolation in their buildings, structures, staff, programs as they proclaim their own arrogance. In the meantime they are dying. When questioned about their current reality they make excuses, and call attention to their leaves because they are fruitless!
	So what is the solution? What is the direction?

F.	Return briefly to your original dyads and triads for 3 minutes — each group should receive a different passage of Scripture and come up with bullet points/key words for each. Return to the large group and simply list the key words/points off for each Scripture verse:
	• Colossians 1:18
	• Colossians 1:24
	• Romans 12:4-5
	• Ephesians 4:11-16
	• Matthew 18:20
	• I John 4:I
	• Mark 4:16-17

G. As we read Colossians I:18, 24, we emphasize the Biblical understanding of the Church. The word "Church" itself is "ekklesia" which means an assembly. And we see that "(Christ) is the head of the body, the church" Colossians I:18 and He suffered "for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Col I:24) Thus we see that the Biblical definition of "church" is a corporate body and not an institution. In addition the body of Christ is supposed to be a living healthy body and not a sick or dead body. The difference between these is that a sick or dead body has non-functioning members. I was a chaplain with hospice and was with numerous people as they died. If often happens one part or member of the body at a time. The dysfunction starts with the extremities and moves toward the center until the body can no longer function. Now I don't believe this can happen to the whole body of Christ, but you would have to be living in the absolute denial of reality to assume that it does not happen to individual congregation and even denominational bodies. But that is not the kind of assembly the Bible speaks of when referring to the Church.

Notice the Biblical description of the church (Romans 12:4,5). Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Ephesians 4:II-I6 – It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for works of service, so that the <u>body of Christ</u> may be built up until <u>we all</u> reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then <u>we</u> will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, <u>we</u> will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

According to Matthew 18:20, this happens whenever two or three come together in the name of Jesus, He promises to be there with them.

Thus, every individual member should not simply be present, but be functioning. And there should be growth in maturity, mutual accountability and responsive, obedient behavior, living out our faith, and sharing the Gospel in the context of every relationship. That is the objective. Unfortunately, <u>institutionalism moves the attention away from the individual function to simply being passive observers of what other institutional leaders and structures are accomplishing</u>.

How can we counteract inactivity or passivity in the local congregation? How can we promote a healthy understanding of the nature of the Body of Christ as a living organism?

H. Second, focus on the Biblical mission Jesus gave to His Church in the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Now, therefore, go 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 obey all that I have commanded you and I am with you always, even to the close of the age."

We must lead people to faith in Jesus Christ and disciple them. Teach them the faith. Use the Bible as the primary tool to help them know who Jesus is and the nature of His Kingdom. Help them learn, grow and mature in the faith and be truly transformed, until they are fully equipped to use their gifts from the Holy Spirit to begin to disciple others.

This is the only mission of the Church. Everything else we do is to help us accomplish this mission. We love others so we can share the love of Christ, the love we have first received. We love so we can proclaim Jesus Christ and His life-saving love that is the only source of salvation. We must be disciples and commit ourselves exclusively to making disciples!

How do you maintain the focus on the central mission of the Church and still do everything else that has become the "work of the church" for previous decades?

I. Third, focus on the Bible, for teaching, preaching, for guidance in the way of living faithfully. Encourage believers to read and study the Word of God together, to accept the Bible as the norm for all matters of their life and faith. Help the to be so equipped with the Word that they can do what John encourages all Christians to do to test the spirits. I John 4:I – "Beloved, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." The Lord commands every disciple of Jesus to compare all teachings to the truth of Scripture. Notice in Acts 17: Paul commended the Bereans who exercised skepticism towards his own teachings. "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Jesus encourages His disciples to grow deep in the soil of Christ, to be rooted in Christ. Institutionalism keeps their roots in the shallow soil of the rocky ground of the institution instead of Christ. Mark 4:16-17 "those who are sown on the rocky places, are those who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy. They have no root in themselves, but are short-lived." Institutionalism tends towards producing unrooted Christians — those who have a faith which is only on the surface, in the institution. Being deeply rooted in Christ is the goal of discipleship.

How do you ensure the spiritual growth and commitment to read and study the scripture daily? Which of the following list is most challenging for 1. You; 2. Your Congregation and why?

Discipleship is:

- Focused on function not form
- Spirit rather than the letter
- Biblical truth not human wisdom
- Inward nature not outward appearance
- Grace and mission not law and regulations
- J. Paul warns Timothy that the day will come when people will only hear what they want to hear and will gather leaders who will only tell them what their itching ears want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). The authority of Christ is always replaced by leaders of institutions seeking their own political power and acceptance.

Is there anything positive or necessary regarding the institutional nature of the church?

I am not attempting to undermine everything that I just said but rather to remind you that Discipleship can only function in a community where there is mutual accountability and responsibility. There must be oversight that requires organization and some structure. There must be expectations. To obey all that Jesus commands requires that we are accountable to Christ and to one another. Jesus was accountable to the Father. The disciples were accountable to Jesus and so we must be accountable to one another and especially those who have spiritually authority over us in the name of Christ Jesus. Discipleship is not in individualized pursuit of Jesus but one that occurs in the context of Christian Community just as Jesus first followers were knit together in a community.

In the name of Jesus, disciples must long for such accountability. It is the only true way to demonstrate love, to have expectations and to hold one another accountable in following Christ. Some institutionalization is not the same as the over-institutionalization of the Church.

Love and structure go together. Love needs structure. Every family knows the importance of structure and expectation if true love is to be experienced. That is the nature of the institution of the family. As you reflect on the continuum below, place an "x" next to where you and your congregation fall on the continuum.

Authentic Community	Institutional Structure
Romanticist	needs Classicist
Heart	needs Head
Creativity	needs Orde
Love	needs Truth and Authority

	the Second Coming of Christ. We can nev	om Genesis to Revelation, from Creation to er forget that we live in a fallen world. Jesus be concerned with binding and loosing peo				
	from sin. This is the way to accountability	0 01				
	Read Matthew 16:18-19 and Matthew 18:18-20 aloud as a group. If time permits, read					
	the following list aloud, again marking who continuum. Reflect on the reasons why — b	ere you and your congregation fall on the				
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