

How should a person decide if they should join a church and make it their spiritual home? What should the discernment process look like? Obviously if they are visiting for the first time, and they walk in the doors and hear God audibly say, “PLACE YOUR MEMBERSHIP HERE!” that would be a clear sign. But absence a James Earl Jones voice coming over the PA, how would you know? Would you look at how close it is to your house? Would you consider if you have friends who attend? Would you want to know if they have a good children’s and youth ministry, or if it is a church that is regularly leading new people to faith in Christ? Would you want to know if the elders of the church are wise and godly men? Would you evaluate the quality of the biblical preaching and whether or not you feel encouraged and built up from the sermons? There are so many different aspects of a church you would want to evaluate. But one of the most important elements, one I almost never hear anyone talk about, is how that church goes about making disciples. How does a church help people grow and flourish in the faith? Dallas Willard said you can ultimately boil everything about a church down to just two questions: how does the church make disciples, and is it working?

As a church, we do everything we possibly can to help people grow as disciples, to see people come to look, live, and love more like Jesus. Jesus is our Lord and Savior. He is the ultimate example—he lived a life of perfect intimacy with the father; he embodied love for others, grace and truth, justice and compassion, and holiness and mercy in the most beautiful and inspiring ways, and we want to become like him in every area of our lives. We want every person here to be shaped into his image and day after day come to look more and more like him.

How do we do that? We have a pathway that includes weekend worship, engaging in a small group, growing in prayer, being equipped and empowered to serve and live a life on mission, and participating in bible classes for theological training, leadership development, and spiritual discernment. We have a very robust and effective pathway for discipleship, but the question still remains: What sort of disciple does this church make? In that pathway, what do we emphasize and focus on?

We answer that question as a church through our seven priorities—**worship, gospel, kingdom, scripture, identity, community, and generosity**. This is the 7 in our 317. We want people to live lives of worship, to seek God’s presence and honor in everything they do, to be grounded in and shaped by the gospel and to proclaim it boldly in word and in deed. We want people to embody the qualities of God’s kingdom in their character and to advance God’s kingdom through their lives, so that the fame and deeds of God are renewed and known in our day. We train people to delight in God’s word, not just to read it but to treasure it and to make all their major decisions based upon the truth found in it. We teach people to live out of their true identity as a son or daughter of God, to live in loving, Spirit-led, interdependent community, and following the example of Jesus, to be joyfully, spontaneously, sacrificially generous, giving their time, their abilities, and their finances to enrich the lives of other people and advance God’s kingdom. As a church, these are our priorities; this is the grid we use to make disciples. Because we are a church, we also use this grid to help us make all of our major decisions.

I am so excited for this series. We are going to take the next seven weeks to focus on each one of our priorities in turn, and to highlight the path that we can take to become more like Jesus.

Today, we focus on **worship**. There are many passages from which we could learn about worship. Worship is about our attachments. It’s about where we find meaning and purpose, what we seek in order to encounter transcendence, what we place ultimate value in, and where we find fulfillment. Luke 10:38-42 clearly shows a person putting God in that place.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

In this passage we find two sisters. One was doing a good thing, taking care of her house and preparing food for her guests, but Jesus looked at her and said, "You are busy and distracted." In Greek those words mean to be pulled apart and dragged away. She knew time with Jesus mattered, but she had other things that mattered, too, so she was left fragmented. That's the way 90% of Christians I know feel. I'm in that camp myself sometimes, too. We know time with Jesus matters, but so does feeding the kids, mowing the yard, responding to emails, and making sure I've seen the best content that was put on YouTube and social media the last few days. We all have important things pulling at us, causing us to spend most of our days fragmented rather than focused. But not Mary. Mary was focused. Jesus said, "Few things are needed—or indeed only one." That is the heart of worship—realizing that only one thing is needed, and that although you recognize there are many things that matter in life, you want Jesus more than anything else!

Sometimes we think about worship as if we are going to take our list of all the things we have to do in life and put God at the top. There is value to this; it clearly shows God as the highest priority. But I think rather than being at the top of our lives, God wants to be the center of our lives, like the hub of a wheel, where he is the orienting reality around which everything else flows and takes shape.

Here's how we say it at The Creek: "Worship—we seek God's presence and honor in everything we do." How do we do that? How can we be formed into disciples who are focused rather than fragmented, who have the love of God and the longing for God at the center of our being? I want to present three simple words that have shaped me and ground each one of those words in a Psalm, from the worship manual of the Bible.

The first word is **delight**. Worshipful disciples are those who delight in God's presence, those who, like Mary, know that there is no better place to be. Psalm 16 is a master class in delight—look at some of the verses:

- Verse 2: "You are my God, apart from you I have no good thing."
- Verse 5: "Lord, you alone are my portion."
- Verse 8: "I keep my eyes always on the Lord."
- Verse 11: "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (ESV).

This is the heart-cry of a person who sincerely delights in God. My little girl turned three years old this week. Most nights I have to give her very strong encouragement to finish her dinner and eat all of her vegetables. Sometimes, she takes 45 minutes to eat four ounces of food. But she never needs encouragement to eat ice cream. Because she delights in it, because she enjoys it, voraciously consuming it. The same is true for our walk with the Lord. Psalm 34:8 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." God invites us to experience for ourselves how satisfying he is. Don't live vicariously through the Yelp reviews others leave at the restaurants. Get your own reservation—taste and see for yourself. Almost every religion in the world teaches something similar: they have different names for God, but whatever

they call their god, the essence of their religion is that there is a God who is real and powerful, therefore we should obey him. That's all religions in a nutshell. Like a butterfly shedding its cocoon and stretching its wings, Christianity transforms people with an entirely novel idea: there is a God who is real, powerful, loving, and beautiful. With this fundamental shift, the "therefore" changes. "Therefore" it is my heart's desire to pursue and worship him. There is a radical shift from behavior modification to joyful orientation of our lives around him.

When well-known pastor and author John Piper takes people's confession of faith before baptism, he doesn't ask them if they believe in Jesus. He thinks belief is too tame, too generic, too bland a word. Instead, he asks them if they treasure Jesus. He wants to know if Jesus has become their delight. He's on to something. Jesus told a story in Matthew 13:44. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." As soon as the man found the treasure, he decided to sell everything of value he had in the entire world to be able to buy the field and claim the prize. It wasn't something anyone forced him to do. No one twisted his arm or guilted him. He didn't do it begrudgingly. In his joy he sold all he had, because nothing else in his life held a candle to the value and worth of that treasure. Nothing in all the world holds a candle to the value and worth of Jesus. He is not only real, but also beautiful, and in his presence is the fullness of joy. Eternal pleasures are found at his right hand.

First word—delight. Second word—**desire**. We desire more of that which we delight. We want to be a church filled with disciples who desire God from the core of our being. We see this longing, this craving throughout the Psalms, but it's put so powerfully in Psalm 63:1-5.

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

This isn't a man who is being dragged to church by his wife; this isn't a man who is going through the motions and checking the boxes out of obligation. This is a man driven by desire! Look at the words he uses to describe his desire for God:

- Earnestly I seek you.
- I thirst for you.
- I will praise you as long as I live.
- In your name I will lift up my hands.
- I will be fully satisfied with the richest of foods.

These are not the muted expressions of a conservative puritan; these are the exclamations of a hedonist! These are the words of a person who loves pleasure and extravagance and excess and has found that the greatest pleasure and extravagance are found in God! Remember who wrote Psalm 63. It wasn't a monk who lived a life of poverty and want; it was David, a man who enjoyed all the benefits of being the king of Israel. David knew every good and luxurious pleasure this world had to offer, and he had more power than anyone in all the land. But he thought God's love is better than life. He had more wealth than anyone in all the land, but God's love is better than life. He had more fame and notoriety than anyone else in all the land—women literally sang with joy in the streets for his accomplishments—but God's love is better than life. As king he sinfully took access to the most beautiful women in all the land and knew every physical pleasure possible, but he said God's love is better than life.

I love the way author CS Lewis put it:

It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Heartbreakingly, this is not the Christian experience most people know. Most people know a Christianity that is about dos and don'ts, but the purest form of Christianity is not about dos and don'ts but about deep desire. It's not "I will," and "I won't"; it's "I want." I want to be near the Lord. George Muller was one of the most influential Christians in the 19th century. He saw the drastic need to care for abandoned or neglected children, so he started an orphanage that ended up caring for over 10,000 kids. He went on to start over 100 schools throughout Britain that served over 120,000 students. His love for God and love for others altered the landscape of the entire nation. And he did it all without ever asking for a single dollar. All he did was pray and ask God to provide, and time and time again, God gave him what he needed. His biography is one of the most encouraging and inspiring works I've ever read. With all of his profound insight, with everything Muller knew about justice, compassion, intercession, prayer, and caring for orphans and children, Muller believed his first duty every day was to make himself happy in God. That's the heart of worship.

Delight. Desire. The third word—**desperation**. When we truly delight in something and have an intense desire for it, we will eventually have a sense of desperation. A passionate, life-consuming connection with God is not just something we want to have; it is something we know we must have. Listen to the way we hear this described in Psalm 42:1-2: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" These words picture a deer in the peak of the summer, beat down by the scorching sun, who finds itself in a drought condition, panting, desperate to find a stream of water to be satisfied and restored. The psalmist says that's how my soul thirsts for God, not just delight and desire, but desperation. God, more than I need anything else, I need you.

There are two stories in the Bible that capture this in a powerful way. The first is in John 6. Jesus is now two years into his ministry and has gained a large following. At this point, there are thousands of people around him who are listening to his teaching, who have seen him take a few fish and loaves and miraculously multiply them to feed the masses. They know Jesus is special. They know what he is capable of. And now that they know that, Jesus raises the bar. He calls them to a higher level of commitment and sacrifice, to center their lives around him. As soon as he does, the excitement begins to die down, the crowds thin out, and almost every single person walks away. Thousands have turned their backs to leave and then Jesus turns to the twelve, the people who know him best, those who have been with him the longest and asks them, "What about you? Are you going to leave, too?" And Peter, speaking for the disciples gives the best reply I've ever heard: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Sure, following you comes at a steep price, but you are the only one who offers eternal life. We have no other option—we are desperate for you!

Moses said something similar. Moses was the man God called to lead the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt. When he did, the Israelites, God's people, committed idolatry and rejected the Lord. God said, go on without me. Go to the promised land, have your freedom, but do it on your own. If you don't want to be my people, I'm not going to force myself upon you. Moses, as the leader of God's people responded and said: "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). In other words, yes, we made mistakes. We attached ourselves to lesser things, lesser loves. But we've come to our senses, and we simply cannot go on without you. We would rather stay here and starve to death in the

wilderness with you, then to have all the comforts and luxuries of life in the promised land without you. God, we are desperate for you!

There is one thing that everyone I personally know who has truly experienced breakthrough in their spiritual lives has in common—they have come to the place where they are desperate for God, and they have experienced God to be so wonderful, so all sufficient and all satisfying, that they believe in the core of their being that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God and nothing else. God is enough. As a church, that is the kind of disciples we are trying to help you to become, a worshipful disciple who delights in God, who desires God, and who, above all else, like Mary at the feet of Jesus, has released all lesser things because you are desperate for God!

There are two other windows into Mary's life, in John 11 and John 12. Because she lived a life of worship, she witnessed the miraculous and left a testament of devotion that Jesus said would last for generations and be told to countless others. That's what we want—a life of such incredible worship and devotion that we see Jesus roll stones away and do miracles in our time, and we leave behind a legacy of sacrificial worship and extravagant love that lasts for generations to come.

Invite people forward for prayer at the altar. Call out to him!