

Can It Really Be That Simple

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What are the essentials of living a Christ-centered life? How can I be an effective and faithful follower of Christ? This resource walks through the three “reals” of Chi Alpha. These principles, if applied, will lead to a life well spent following Jesus.

One of the greatest tragedies in life is watching a follower of Jesus give up and check himself out of the race. Many people find it very difficult to give up their own will over things and to surrender everything to Him, and plenty of others never acquire the understanding of how to become strong enough to withstand the inevitable hardships of life. GK Chesterton said it best: “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.” (Chapter 5, *What's Wrong With The World*.) Difficult in the sense of being wholly life-changing, yes. But being an effective and faithful follower of Christ is not impossible, nor is the way to become a solid and mature follower of Christ a secret.

One of my favorite movie scenes of all time is in the film *National Treasure*, when the character of Benjamin Gates finally realizes that he literally has been holding the key to the treasure the whole time. Standing in the dusty and disappointing antechamber, he looks back and forth from the key to the lock on the wall and says, “Can it really be that simple?” The dialogue ends for a few minutes, and we watch with growing amazement as the key in his possession unlocked the door to a treasure far beyond anyone’s ability to imagine.

Yes, it really is that simple. There are a few principles which the Lord has helped us learn along the way, and everyone who understands these things and applies them to their life has a much easier time resisting the schemes of the Enemy - who really would like to destroy each and every one of us. Not only do these principles help us resist falling into traps of sin, deception and despair, but they also open the door to real and abundant life – True Christianity. So many Christians who really love Jesus and want to serve Him never get past the drudgery of trying to follow a self-imposed list of do’s and don’ts. That is not at all what Jesus meant when He said abundant life! He wants to give peace and joy and fullness – real life, full of hope and purpose – like the massive treasure chamber that stretches on and on at the end of *National Treasure*. These principles can be simplified into three things that every believer needs to make a priority of practicing and teaching in every stage of life.

Real Devotional Life

If everyone in Christendom understood the principle of a true devotional life, the world would be a very different place. Some people brush it aside as unnecessary, others have good intentions yet never follow through, while many more entirely misunderstand the concept. Oftentimes, we unwittingly project the idea that people must come to the large group meetings to be fed. The not-so-subtle insinuation is that the minister or teacher is the only one qualified to teach us and help us grow. Logically following that is the thought that one cannot properly feed himself. Of course that is not at all true. It was never meant to be the pastor's job to carry everyone of his flock on his back, until Heaven. It is one thing for a baby to be dependent on its parent to feed him with a bottle, but another thing altogether for a grown man or woman to still need someone to administer the bottle lest they starve. We must learn to feed ourselves daily if we want to grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

The basic elements of a healthy devotional life include prayer and study. If your prayer life is currently nonexistent, set some goals for yourself and be disciplined to reach

them. For example, make a pledge to pray for 10 minutes every day. Write a list of people and things to pray for, and set to it. You will be amazed that once you do this for a few days, 10 minutes will just not be enough. Prayer seems difficult and maybe even boring until you really do it and find that you are not just talking to yourself – God is with you and He is speaking to you. Not only that, but praying for others is the often overlooked key to building real love and relationship with them. God really does supernatural things when we pray. When we begin to honor the Lord's presence, the concept of praying without ceasing becomes easier to understand and achieve. Foster an attitude of thankfulness throughout the day. God is so good and often we miss hundreds of opportunities to recognize His faithfulness in our lives. Strive to put your mind on Him all day, every day and it will change your life.

Study is much more than occasional reading: take your mind and stretch it. Dig into the Bible; pick a section of the Old Testament to read, try reading the whole New Testament at a stretch, or just read the whole book from cover to cover. Set some goals in reading the Word and discipline yourself to achieve them. Try reading Bible commentaries - your depth of understanding will be greatly increased. Read books written by the saints through the ages who have lived and walked with God before us. Their wisdom, understanding and experience is there on record to edify the body of Christ today. Stretch your mind, think deeply about the Lord, about His character, His Word, and His promises. Think in terms of an athlete - no one can approach the pull-up bar for the first time and do 20 pull-ups. But with training, conditioning, time and discipline one pull-up gives way to two, then four, and eventually the twenty that seemed so impossible become a reality. We are not called to be an ignorant and brainless body of believers; we can have the Mind of Christ! Step by step, day by day - we build ourselves up in faith and understanding through a disciplined and purposeful devotional life.

Real Community

When you begin the journey as a follower of Christ, you need some help along the way. Real friends are the people who will walk along beside you as you all follow Christ together, people who will love you enough to tell you the truth and to redirect you if need be, but who will also encourage you as you seek to live how God asks us to live. Of course we don't abandon our friends who are lost; hopefully they will see and hear what God has done in our lives and seek Him also. But true fellowship needs to come from real friends who will help us walk with the Lord. Friends who will lift up and encourage, who will make you think with the great conversations you have together, who will be a reminder of the way you are striving to live - this is true brotherhood.

As we mature, real community remains an imperative. Many Christians, pastors included, fail and fall for a lack of true friends. There often comes a point as we go further in our walk with the Lord when we can deceive ourselves into thinking that there is no one who is able, willing or qualified to help us. This is nothing but pride, and we have no one to help us only when we refuse to trust our brothers and sisters. The church is stifled and rendered almost impotent when mature believers refuse to love and trust one another. Just like in nature, the one who is alone, isolated, and sick is the easiest one to be picked off by the predator. How many believers and even church leaders have fallen because they had no one to trust and be honest with about their struggles?

As we grow in maturity in the Lord, there will never be a lack of people we can pour into, teach, challenge, and encourage. At the same time, there will never be a time in life when we do not need brothers who can tell us the truth, encourage, and redirect us if need be. Not only that, but it is a biblical truth that iron sharpens iron; we are better together than we are alone. How much

do we in the church (and all those around us) miss out on when we refuse to walk in trust, honor and community with other Christians? Alone, a believer can be a lovely representation of Christ, yes; but together we become a mighty beacon of light and hope to the world - truly a city on a hill whose light cannot be hidden and whose presence acts as a magnet, compelling the lost to come home. No matter what stage of life we are in, we need to love, honor, and trust one another in real, godly friendships.

Real Responsibility

Throughout many years of being a college minister, one summertime story often plays out in the lives of many of our students. He or she may have been the most responsible person in their whole dorm – great grades, part-time job, super small group leader, even neatly folded laundry... but they find that the moment they return home they become a whiny, lazy, selfish child again. Their mom might do everything for them out of sheer force of habit - but the truth is that everyone knows it is gross for a twenty year old to sleep until noon every day, to shove dirty dishes under the bed, and to wait until their mother does the laundry for them. It is not difficult to see that something is very undesirable about that scenario.

It is the same way in our walk with the Lord - whether we are twenty or forty or sixty. We must have some real responsibility or we will not only stop growing, we will actually begin to regress. There is a misconception in the church today that being committed and having responsibility means simply having a job or a task: unlocking the doors, or running the computers, or being a part of the worship team. These things are important, but they are not the real responsibility that will grow a person into a mature believer.

We must never take lightly the great responsibility that every one of us has for people - to win souls. Our job as believers, the very thing that will make us grow up and be unselfish, is to share the good news with the people in our sphere of influence, to teach them how to walk with the Lord, and to teach them how to pass everything on to someone else. We must always be mindful of the people around us. It is no accident that you are rubbing shoulders with the people you find yourself around at this time. Minister to them, serve them, share your faith with them, pray for them, fight for them, honor them, love them. Do unto them as you would do unto the Lord. Very few people wander into relationship with Jesus on their own, and it is not just the pastor's job to bring people in - it is our responsibility. When a follower of Christ accepts this great responsibility, not only will many people be brought into the Kingdom, but that person will find himself growing in his own relationship with the Lord in ways that would have been impossible otherwise.

Many people sit in churches and congregations all of their lives without ever understanding the concept of individual responsibility. We look and see the many empty seats around us, and often blame the preacher or the worship team or the facility itself for not doing their job to attract and keep new people. We hide behind ecclesiastical busyness, contenting ourselves to remain stagnant through our many meetings and tasks, selfishly refusing to look and see our responsibility to win the lost and disciple them. We point to the church sign on the street and say to ourselves that everyone can plainly see the time church starts; it is their own fault if they never come. But that simply is not the way it works. Very infrequently a person is brought to the feet of Jesus by a dream or vision, but the vast majority of the time, people are brought to the Lord by faithful disciples like Andrew, who consistently brought people to the Messiah. Responsibility for others and to God's kingdom is an essential factor of true Christianity.

Yes, it really is that simple. A real devotional life, real community, and real

responsibility are the key components of a life well spent in serving Jesus. Without all three, it would be difficult to finish the race as a Kindergarten teacher in an affluent and safe suburb. But with all three, a believer can be all alone in a hostile land and thrive. When we incorporate these three areas into our own lives, teach those under our care how to have these three things, and also teach them how to pass it on to another generation - then we are well on our way to the abundant and fruitful life Jesus offers to us and to the world around us.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is your devotional life like now? What can you do in the next week to start strengthening your devotional life?
2. What about Real Community is easy for you? What about being in Real Community is difficult? Why?
3. What is one way you can take Real Responsibility for those around you this week?
4. Does living out these three "reals" seem that simple? Why or why not?