

“Aiming at the Bullseye”
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First in a series about Discipleship Practices

Philippians 3.4b-14

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“Is this on the test?”

Students ask it. Teachers hate it. *Why not learn for it's own sake, because it's important, because it's helpful, because it's interesting? Don't worry! Just learn.*

“Okay. But is that on the test?”

What if there was no test?

“Follow me,” Jesus says.

We have accounts of some of the first times people heard that call, that invitation from Jesus. Most seem to have been very ordinary people. Or less than ordinary. If you were putting together an “A-Team,” you would pass these over without a second glance. Jesus stopped and looked right at them. *“Follow me.”* Often they did. They still do.

One of the first was Simon, a small business owner. His response gets me. Simon saw Jesus in action — doing something incredible things — and fell to his knees. *“Leave me, Lord! I'm a sinner!”* That's like saying, *“No hope for me. I've already failed the test!”*

Know what Jesus said? *“Don't be afraid. From now on, people will be your business. Follow me.”*¹

What if there is not a test? What if you already passed? Even before you started?

That's following Jesus. It's not about being good enough to pass a test. It's about discovering who Jesus is. As you do, you are being shaped by him into whom he's already made you to be.

II

What is a disciple? A disciple is a student, a learner. A disciple is a certain kind of student. A disciple learns information, but not just information. A disciple gains knowledge, but more

¹ Luke 5:1-11.

than knowledge. A disciple acquires skills, but that's only part of it.

A disciple enters into a life. A disciple learns that new way of living from their teacher. The teacher has already mastered the craft. A disciple learns by being with their teacher, watching their teacher, imitating their teacher, being encouraged and corrected by their teacher. Disciples become like their teacher.

Jesus is our teacher. He invites us into his life. Not only has he mastered it. He made it, this life. He says to you, "*Follow me.*"

That should feel daunting. *Me? Be shaped by Jesus!. To become like him! Me!*

Yes, you, if he is calling you. I think he is.

A disciple is "a person who has been changed by the awareness of the loving presence and power of Jesus Christ at work in their lives, and that experience leads to living life in ways that reflect God's love and grace in all its forms."²

The many, many, many people Jesus has called before you and me have learned some important practices. Jesus uses them to shape us in this disciple-life. We're going to be looking at some of these over the next few weeks.

III

I'm drawing on a book called *Bullseye: Aiming to Follow Jesus*. It's written by two ministers in Brampton, who serve with North Bramalea United Church. They are Jamie Holtom and Debbie Johnson.

A bullseye is the centre of a target. It's what you're aiming for. Knowing where the bullseye is points us in the right direction. Debbie and Jamie have identified six of these ancient and time-tested tools that Jesus uses to shape us as his followers.

These are:

- Using Spiritual Practices
- Worshipping Together Weekly
- Discovering Authentic Community
- Serving with Our Gifts
- Giving Generously
- Sharing Christ

Each week, we'll delve into one of these.

² Jamie Holtom and Debbie Johnson, *Bullseye: Aiming to Follow Jesus* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2015), p. 5.

IV

My mom is a wise woman. She often said “Yes” to things I wanted. She also said “No.” One thing she said “No” to was a dartboard. Our walls thanked her.

In this photo, someone has thrown their 3 darts. How are they doing? One dart hit triple-1. One stuck in the edge of the board. The third is in the wall. The best score you can get in a turn is 120. This person scored 3. If it was a test. . . .

What if I told you this was the person’s first time throwing darts. Also, the order they threw them. The first hit the wall, which is better than the floor or ceiling! The second caught the board. Then they hit triple-1, which is close to the best shot possible (triple-20).

How do you say they’re doing now?

Getting better.

These discipleship practices are not a test. The bullseye gives us something to aim for and grow toward.

Debbie and Jamie write, *“If you aim at these targets, you will be taking steps in the right direction and, even more than that, creating space for God to work in your life, and the life of your congregation.”*³

IV

We heard what Paul wrote to Christians in Philippi. He talked about all he had going for him: his heritage, his accomplishments, his passion. If life was a balance sheet, he was rich with assets.

Then Jesus encountered him. Jesus turned Paul whole life around. Before, he had been violently opposed to Jesus. But Jesus would not let him go. He called Paul, and Paul followed Jesus, and Jesus started to work on him.

What about his assets? Well, he stopped attacking Jesus’ people. The other things were still true. But Paul saw they are not worth much, not compared to the life of following Jesus.

Here’s the thing with this life of following Jesus. It’s his gift. All of it, purely a gift of God’s grace. We don’t pass a test to earn it. Following Jesus is not a test. It’s about living rightly with God, and then rightly with others. Jesus has already passed the test that makes this possible: by his own life of faithfully living God’s way, by his own faithful death as a failure for all our failures, by his own resurrection so we can have new life, now and forever. Jesus

³ Ibid, 4.

passed the test: for Paul, for you, for me.

Then Paul wrote this. I'll read it from a different translation than we heard earlier.

I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal [the bullseye], where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.⁴

This is how Paul described this journey all of us are on, when we've heard Jesus say to us, "follow me." So may Paul's words become ours too. Amen.

⁴ Philippians 3:12-14 (The Message).