

8 PRINCIPLES OF A GOD-CENTERED CHURCH

Study companion for The Lesson of the Loaves

KEY SCRIPTURES

- Sending out the twelve Apostles: Mark 6:7-13
- God's provision for our needs: Deuteronomy 8:1-5
- The death of John the Baptist and the disciples' return coincide:
 - Matthew 14:13
 - Mark 6:30-32
- The feeding of the 5,000: Mark 6:30-44
- Jesus walks on the water: Mark 6:45-52



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was Jesus teaching His disciples through the feeding of the five thousand? Was it the first time that He had taught them that lesson?
 - Jesus was teaching His disciples to be fully dependent on Him and to have faith in His power and provision for all their needs. He had begun teaching the disciples this lesson by sending them out on missionary journeys without any supplies.
- Why did Jesus ask His disciples to go away with Him to rest?
 - He wanted to spend some time with His Father in order to deal with His grief about John the Baptist's passing, and He knew that He needed to teach the disciples the lesson of dependence again.
- What is the tip-off that the disciples didn't learn the lesson the first time around?
 - The disciples returned from their missionary journeys bragging about all that 'they' had done.
- Why did Jesus tell His disciples to feed the crowd of people that came to hear Him speak?
 - He knew that they couldn't, and He wanted them to realize that. He was reteaching the lesson of reliance on His power and provision.

APPLICATION

- Just as the disciples did not learn the lesson of the loaves even though Jesus taught it to them many times, we are often slow to listen to God's teaching and quick to forget it. Submit yourself to God daily and acknowledge that you can do nothing without Jesus' power. Jesus wants to empower you; He will accomplish His purposes in you if you ask.
- Throughout your study of this book, ask God to keep you completely reliant on Him. You will not be able to apply any of the principles of this book if you try to do it in your power. Look to Jesus daily for direction, provision, and power.

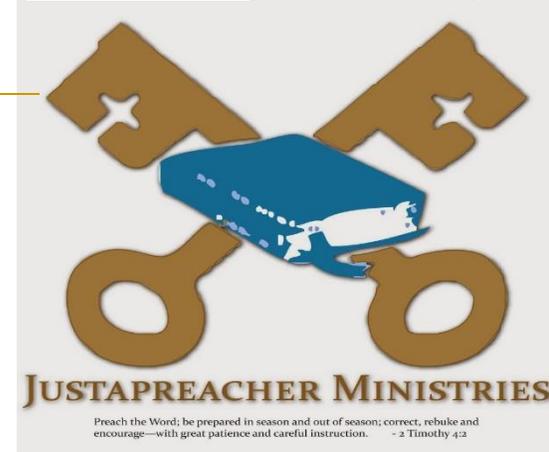
8 PRINCIPLES OF A GOD-CENTERED CHURCH

Study companion for Principle One

GOD MAY NOT DUPLICATE A METHOD

KEY SCRIPTURES

- Getting water in the wilderness:
 - Exodus 17:1-7
 - Numbers 20:2-12
- Fighting the Philistines: 2 Samuel 5:17-25
- God's passion for His glory: Isaiah 48:11
- Jesus healing blind men:
 - Matthew 9:27-31
 - Mark 8:22-26
 - John 9:6-7



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What determines if, when, and how things are done in your church? Do you follow calendars and tradition, or do you follow God's leading and direction in each unique circumstance?
 - Examine your church's process in the space below. Ask God to put your focus back on Him and His plan.
- Why doesn't God often duplicate His methods?
 - God may not duplicate His methods because He is passionate about His glory. He doesn't want the method to receive any of the glory that belongs to Him. In addition, people tend to put faith in methods, and not in God. So, by switching up His method, God reminds us to continue seeking after Him and His plan in each situation.
- Why was it wrong for Moses to strike the rock the second time that God provided water in the wilderness?
 - God had told Moses to speak to the rock in this instance, but Moses used the same method that he had seen work before. He stole God's glory by trusting more in a method than in God's instructions for that specific situation.
- Do God's changing methods mean that He changes?
 - NO! God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His truth, principles, and Word will never change. He just changes His methods to accomplish His purposes for His glory.

APPLICATION

- Do not put your faith in methods, but in the One who determines the method!
- God doesn't want us to rely on a single method to solve every problem, so He didn't do things the same way every time. Don't think that how God works in your life is how He is supposed to do it for everyone else.
- Instead of relying on what has worked in the past, ask God what He has in mind for each circumstance and decision. He will guide you into His plan, which will be for your best and His glory.

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Study companion for Principle Two

THERE IS NO PERMANENT “THERE” HERE ON EARTH, SO KEEP MOVING WITH GOD

KEY SCRIPTURES

- Jesus calling His disciples:
 - Mark 1:17
 - John 1:35-39
- Jesus moves on: Mark 1:35-39
- God’s provision for Elijah: 1 Kings 17:1-9
- God’s instruction to Adam and Eve: Genesis 1:28
- The Great Commission: Matthew 28:18-20
- The growth of the Church: Acts 4:4
- The Church scattered: Acts 8:1-4



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some results of having faith in God instead of a method, and believing that He may not duplicate His methods?
 - As we walk and consult with God, He will encourage us to try new things (even if it’s scary). He will call us to step out in faith.
- How might God show us that it’s time to move on to the next part of the journey?
 - “Time to move” often looks like a change to the plan right when it seems like it is starting to come together. Elijah had a pretty sweet setup by the brook Cherith until it dried up, but God had somewhere new for him to go, and something new for him to do.
- If God is likely to change His methods and keep moving us along on our journey, should we always change how we do things?
 - No! Change for the sake of change is just as bad as clinging to old methods because they used to work. If you decide to always do things differently than you’ve done them before, you are still trying to create a formula. Rather, listen to God in each situation to see if He wants you to change it up, and if so, exactly how He wants you to do that.

APPLICATION

- Following Jesus requires movement. He doesn’t often tell us the destination; He just asks us to follow Him step by step and day by day. Are you up for that challenge?
- Remember that even when the brook dries up, God has another plan to take care of you. He will never leave us or forsake us, and He delights to give good things to His children. Don’t dig deeper into the dry brook; look for where God is taking you next.
- Whether you willingly move with God or not, He will accomplish the work that He has set out to do. Yet there is much more reward for you if you sincerely seek and follow His will. Do not fear God’s next “there.” It is where God is.

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Study companion for Principle Three

GOD ALREADY HAS THE PLAN, USE HIS

KEY SCRIPTURES

- How we can seek out God's ways:
 - Romans 11:33-36
 - Romans 12:2
- Jesus quizzes Philip: John 6:1-6
- Jesus' clear instructions for Passover: Luke 22:7-13
- Jesus cleans up after Peter: Luke 22:35-51
- The Great Commission: Matthew 28:18-20



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does God want us to seek after Him and His plan?
 - God wants us to seek after Him because He has specific instructions for us. Those instructions teach us who He really is, about His glory, power, and omnipotence.
- How do we find out what specific instructions God has for us?
 - When we yield control of our lives and lay our flesh daily on the altar before God, we will be able to recognize God's will!
- When God tells you to do something, are you supposed to run off and immediately do it?
 - Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is no! God doesn't want us to try to do what He has told us to do in our own way and with our own power; He wants us to ask Him how He wants us to do it. Then, the work that God has for you to do will be informed and completed by the power of God, and not your effort.
- How does the faulty definition of stewardship that is popular in churches today distort God's plan?
 - The faulty definition of stewardship leaves too much up to us. If you just "do something for God" with what He's given you, that work is still worthless because God is not in it. True stewardship doesn't waste what God has given, because true stewardship ensures that the resources God gives are also used for the purposes that He has designed them to be used for.
- Should our desire to know all the details of God's plan cause us to sit still until He has revealed every aspect of His plan?
 - Not necessarily. There may be times when God has us sit and wait on Him, but since we have the Holy Spirit within us, many times God wants us to move in the direction that God is guiding, sensing with every step which way God wants us to go. Don't be afraid of getting it wrong; God can take care of our honest mistakes.

APPLICATION

- When seeking out God's plan for you, the 'what' is just the first step of God's instructions. Ask God for the 'how' and the 'when' too.
- Stewardship is doing *what* God says to do with the things that he has given you, as well as doing it *how* He wants you to do it. Stop "living *for* God" and start walking with God.
- Seek out God's what, when, and how, but don't be paralyzed by the fear of getting it wrong. Our big God sees your heart and He is certainly big enough to clean up any mess you accidentally make. Go after the things that God has already revealed to you to do and listen as you go.

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Study companion for Principle Four

THERE ARE NO VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHURCH, ONLY THE CALLED

KEY SCRIPTURES

- David's desire to build the temple: 1 Chronicles 17:1-15
- God selected the tabernacle craftsmen: Exodus 31:1-11
- Choosing a replacement for Judas:
 - Acts 1:15-26
 - Psalm 109:8
- God chooses work for us: Ephesians 2:10
- Isaiah in the presence of God: Isaiah 6:8



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have you ever been jealous that someone else was chosen to do something that you wanted to do?
 - Think back to that time; in retrospect, do you see why God did not allow you to do it?
- How did the disciples choose who would become the twelfth disciple?
 - The disciples didn't choose; they sought out the one God had chosen. They went about the process prayerfully. In this instance, they cast lots and left it up to God to have the lots fall where He wanted. This does not mean that we should always cast lots to decide who God has chosen, but as the disciples sought God in prayer for that specific situation, that is what God had them do.
- What does "volunteer" mean in the context of this principle?
 - "Volunteer" does not just mean an unpaid worker in this context. "Volunteer" refers to anyone who offers to do something in the Church that they are not called to do. This can apply to someone recruited by a committee who doesn't feel called to that ministry or even a pastor taking on responsibilities that God hasn't designed them to do. In a healthy Church, everyone should be participating in the body in exactly the way that God has called them to, and all those parts will make up a complete Body.
- The only time that there appears to be a volunteer in the Bible is when Isaiah is in the presence of God. What are some things that make it clear that even in this instance, Isaiah was not volunteering?
 - Isaiah had just been cleansed and set apart by God for this very task. Isaiah was the only person there in the presence of God, the only person whose tongue was touched by a hot coal. Isaiah's response of "Here I am, send me" was not an independent declaration; it was an obedient response to God's call on his life.

APPLICATION

- In addition to the what, how, and when of His plans, God also knows and has chosen *who* will carry them out. Trust that He will select the right person for the job.
- Do not volunteer to take on responsibilities in the Church that you are not called to, but also make sure that you are not using this principle as a cover for laziness. God has works for every one of us to do, and He wants to show you what they are.

8 PRINCIPLES OF A GOD-CENTERED CHURCH

Study companion for Principle Five

GOD DESIGNED THE CHURCH TO DO THE WORK, NOT JUST THE PASTORS

KEY SCRIPTURES

- God's design for the Church: Ephesians 4:11-16
- Examples of things God wants the Body to do, not only the pastors:
 - Galatians 6:1
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:14
 - Philemon 1:6
- The promise of the Holy Spirit:
 - John 16:7
 - John 14:15-21
 - John 16:12-15



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you feel worn out in your ministry? What could be contributing to that?
 - If you are trying to carry out God's plan for you in your own power, you will get burned out. The Holy Spirit never runs out, so if you run on the Holy Spirit's power and not your own, you will never burn out. If you are doing something God did not plan for you to do, He won't empower it.
- What is the pastor's job in the Church?
 - The pastor's job is to equip the body of Christ so that they will be prepared to do the work of the ministry that builds the body up. The pastor should not be the only one doing the work that God has designed the body to do.
- What are the four types of pastoral leadership? What is the flaw in how we often call a new pastor?
 - God has designed there to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers leading the Church. Unfortunately, often when we call a new pastor, we write a wish list of what qualities we want the new pastor to have and we expect one man to have all four gift sets.

APPLICATION

- God has not designed one man to do the work of the entire body. Likewise, God has not designed one man to possess all four gifts of leadership. Let your pastor be the type of leader that God has designed him to be, so he can focus on equipping the Church.
- Ask God what works of the ministry He has called you to and get plugged in so that you can begin to build the body up, as we were designed to do.
- The pastor is not the only one who can be the hands and feet of Jesus, so don't treat him like he is. The Holy Spirit indwells each one of us and wants to minister through us as well.

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Study companion for Principle Six

GETTING BACK TO BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP

KEY SCRIPTURES

- The early Church's priorities: Acts 2:42-47
- The importance of fellowship: Hebrews 10:24-25
- How to deal with sin in the body:
 - Galatians 6:1
 - Matthew 18:15-17

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does real Biblical fellowship look like?
 - Biblical fellowship looks like unity and living life together, eating together and sharing what you have in order to meet the needs of the body. True Biblical fellowship cannot be achieved by a weekly Wednesday night dinner.
- Why are small groups important?
 - Small groups are important because it is impossible for us to know everyone in the Church intimately. When there are hard times in the Church, we can't expect the pastor to know what everyone needs. It is the opportunity of each small fellowship group to come around its members that are struggling and meet their specific needs, because they know what those needs are.
- Do you have deep Biblical fellowship with other believers?
 - Explain how your life would be affected if you needed to be removed from that fellowship because of sin. Do you see how this would more effectively influence your repentance?
- How else can Biblical fellowship strengthen your personal relationship with God?
 - As briefly mentioned before, being held accountable by your loved and respected brothers and sisters in Christ is effective in helping you repent and turn from sin. In addition to that, your brothers and sisters can help you get closer to God because as you pray together, they may confirm things that God is saying to you.

APPLICATION

- As Jesus' return approaches, it becomes more and more important for us to have deep Biblical fellowship with other believers. Plug into your Church community so that you can build each other up as life gets harder.
- God has designed there to be much deeper fellowship within the Church than we generally see today. Do not neglect meeting together. In fact, live life together daily! You will experience a rich increase in the quality of your relationship with God as a result.



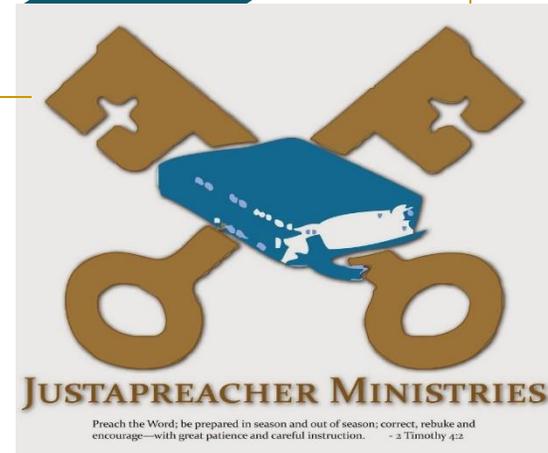
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Study companion for Principle Seven

THE LOST ART OF ABIDING: DOING LESS, ACCOMPLISHING MORE

KEY SCRIPTURES

- Jesus' teaching on abiding: John 15:1-5
- Context of "airo":
 - Matthew 27:32
 - Matthew 14:20
- Some consequences of walking in disobedience:
 - 1 Corinthians 11:27-32
 - Acts 5:1-11
- Leave the results to God:
 - Matthew 6:33
 - 1 Corinthians 3:6
- Phillip's journey: Acts 8:26-40



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the best translation of 'airo' in the context of Jesus' teaching on abiding?
 - While most translations translate 'airo' in this passage as 'takes away' or 'cuts off,' I think it would be more accurate to translate 'airo' as 'lifts up,' as it is translated in other passages that use the same word. This translation is more consistent with what a gardener would do to a vine that was not producing fruit. They would lift it up out of the dirt and give it a chance to produce fruit; they would not immediately cut it off.
- Why is it important that we learn to abide?
 - It is important that we learn to abide because it is the key to Jesus producing fruit in us, for His glory.
- What are some things that will pull you out of the abiding relationship?
 - Focusing on the product or result of the work that God is leading you in and focusing on the destination of where God is directing you to go will both pull you out of the abiding relationship. God doesn't want you to run ahead of Him and try to accomplish the plan on your own; He wants to hold your hand and walk you through every step. That is how you really grow.

APPLICATION

- Do not focus on results in order to measure the work that God is doing. God is responsible for the results when we are obedient to His process. Look for Him and how He is maturing you in every step of that process. Focus on the process, not the product.
- God may sometimes send you towards a destination that He does not intend for you to arrive at, so don't run ahead. Be sensitive to the Spirit's leading; what is He asking you to do right now? Focus on the journey, not the destination.

8 PRINCIPLES OF A GOD-CENTERED CHURCH

Study companion for Principle Eight

LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE WHERE PEOPLE ARE RESPONDING TO GOD'S SPIRIT

KEY SCRIPTURES

- The world is the harvest field: Matthew 28:18-20
- Different roles in the harvest: John 4:34-38
- The complicated spiritual drawing and seeking process:
 - John 6:28-29, 44-45
 - Romans 3:10-11
 - Hebrews 11:6
- How to determine if God is at work: Luke 10:5-12
- The Law reveals the need for God:
 - Luke 18:18-23
 - Romans 3:20
 - James 2:10

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does God work to save people?
 - God works to draw people in many ways, but it is a process. He often uses some people to plant the seed of the Gospel and others to reap the harvest of salvation. Salvation is rarely accomplished in one sitting.
- Where are we supposed to go to work in the harvest field of the world?
 - Just like Jesus, we are only supposed to put in work where we see that God the Father is already at work. If someone is curious about God and the Bible, God is at work there. Plant some seed or water it to cultivate their growth. If you are there when the harvest is ripe, God may have you reap.
- What do we look for in people to determine where God is at work?
 - Look for signs that they are responding to God's drawing. No one seeks God unless He first draws them, so if they are searching for answers and seeking God, God is at work and they are beginning to respond.
- Once we see that God is beginning to draw someone, how do we determine where they are in the ripening process?
 - The next step is to find out if they understand the bad news. If they do not realize that they are a sinner that needs a Savior, the Law can help show them that they cannot be righteous without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Once they understand that, they are ready for the Good News.

APPLICATION

- People give indications of whether they are ready to receive the Gospel. Carefully squeeze, sniff, and thump people to determine where they are in the process of God's drawing.
- When sharing the Gospel, ask these questions: "Are they seeking for God?" "Do they understand the bad news?" and "Are they ready for the Good News?" If the answer to all three is yes, they may be ready to respond to the message of the Gospel, and God may use you to reap the harvest. If the answer is not yes to all three, meet them where they are. Plant and water as God directs.
- Learn to recognize what 'ripe' looks like. Share your faith with those around you, but don't encourage people to pray a prayer if they're not ready. You are not responsible for the fruit; you are to work in the fields.

