

Week 42

Biblical Christianity: Components of the Christian Life

Key Verses

Matthew 6:33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' ³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

John 15:4,5 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

+ Introduction

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People was a trendy business and self-help book from the early '90s. It sold over 25 million copies, and throughout its pages, author Steven Covey describes seven-character traits that translate into habits shared by those he saw as highly effective.

Covey researched success literature over the past two centuries and discovered that success in the past was measured by how much courage, patience, industry, simplicity, or taking a stand against injustice a person displayed. However, around the 1920s, our culture changed, and success began to be measured by personality, public image, attitudes, and behaviors.¹

The idea or goal of being effective in the Christian life is biblical. Jesus praised the servants that doubled or even saw a hundred-fold increase in what they had been given to manage on His behalf. Those who were effective were honored for their work. Those that dismissed the commands of the King or disregarded His Word suffered greatly. (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:13)

In the world we live today, the truths of Scripture are equally as relevant. The journey is just as challenging. And the goal is the same, to apply the timeless truths of the Bible in our daily lives. If we were to list the habits of highly effective Christians, it would look like this 1) seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, 2) love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, 3) love your neighbor as yourself, 4) abide in Christ, and 5) make disciples.

These are not based on a standard developed by men; rather, these components of the Christian life are formed from the commands of Christ. Obedience in these key areas will not guarantee you success in this world, but they will guarantee that you are living your life in agreement with what Jesus instructed. Following the commands of Jesus in this life results in hearing “well done” in the next.

We will answer four questions that will help us understand the components of the Christian life.

- **What is the first commandment?**
- **What is the greatest commandment?**
- **What is the sustaining commandment?**
- **What is the animating commandment?**

+ What is the First Commandment?

MATTHEW 6:33 *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*

This is not the first commandment spoken by God to Israel, which was, “*You shall have no other gods before Me,*” (Exodus 20:3), but rather a restatement by Jesus of the first commandment given in the Old Testament. This is the commandment Jesus gave first-place priority. Matthew 6:33 reads, “*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*”

Think of this command like an umbrella on a rainy day. A good umbrella is big enough to cover you in a heavy Houston rainstorm. This is the broad command of Jesus, “*But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.*” The theme He is developing here in the Sermon on the Mount was one of focus.

It is a waste of time and inappropriate use of emotional energy to worry about what you will eat next or what you will wear tomorrow. It is pointless to worry about the length of life. Why? First, these are things that the world obsesses on. So, the implication is to distinguish yourself from those worries of life. Secondly, Jesus said that your heavenly Father cares for the flowers of the field, the birds of the sky, and the length of our lives. He knows exactly how long we will be here and what we need for each day.

So, choose a better focus. Take on a different agenda. Direct your energy to a better option. Which one? Make the Kingdom of God and His righteousness your priority over the things the rest of the world values so much, all of which fade away.

How is this broad, first command of Jesus able to cover us in the rainstorms of life?

- To be protected from despair and hopelessness when your circumstances are pounding down on you, and you are deeply discouraged, seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.
- To be sheltered from pride or idolatry when life is positively exceeding all expectations, seek first the Kingdom of God. Pride is resting on what we can do on our own, and idolatry is turning the blessings of God into something more important in our hearts than God Himself.
- To be protected from self-medication or unhealthy coping practices to make it through when life is mind-numbingly redundant, and you really are not sure you can make it, seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.
- To keep God and His righteousness your true north when you are at a crossroad in life, and you need direction, seek first the Kingdom of God.

This command from Jesus, like a broad umbrella, will cover us through the storms of life.

That is the first commandment, but as it is so broad, how do we practically live out a “seek first the Kingdom of God” lifestyle? In answering the second question, we will find the answer.

✦ What is the Greatest Commandment?

This is a question that Jesus answered in two parts.

MATTHEW 22:35-39 *One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.” ³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’*

Part I of Jesus' answer:

- Love the Lord your God with all that you are.
- Love the Lord your God, not yourself.
- Love the Lord your God, not the world.
- Love the Lord your God, not the opportunities of the world.
- Love the Lord your God, not the blessings He gives.

This is something simple to state yet complicated in living out. Why? Because we are challenged at every point of life to give our attention and devotion to lesser things. John Calvin said that our minds are a continual idol factory.² That makes sense in looking at our culture and in looking into our own lives.

Timothy Keller in his book, *Making Sense of God*, expands on the idea of idolatry. He writes,

“At age 19, Augustine Aurelius – later to be known as Augustine of Hippo – read a dialogue by the Roman philosopher Cicero in which Cicero stated that every person sets out to be happy, but the majority are thoroughly wretched. Truly, no one dreams as a child of one day growing up to be miserable. And yet, many lives are characterized by conflict, frustration, and unfulfilled longings. Augustine set out to discover why it is that most people are so discontent in life. His conclusion was that for most of us, our lives are ‘out of order.’ In other words, we have disordered loves. Augustine was convinced that what defines a person more than anything is what they love. He said that when we ask if someone is a ‘good’ person, what we are asking is not what they believe or what they hope for, but rather what they love. He stated that what we consider human virtues, i.e., courage, honesty, etc. are essentially forms of love. Courage is loving your neighbor’s well-being more than your own safety. Honesty is loving enough to tell them the truth even if it may put you at a disadvantage.”³

And what is the primary message of American culture? Love this person with all you are. Love yourself with all you are. Love your dreams with all you are. Love this world with all you are. Love this sport. Love this celebrity. Love your work. Pour yourself into it! The more you strive to obtain what you love, the more heroic you will become!

Sin, Augustine said, is ultimately a lack of love, either for God or for your neighbor. “The essence of sin is disordered love.”⁴ We are wired to love. We love many things. But is our love disordered? Do we love God and His kingdom first? What a contrast it is to live according to the commands of Jesus. The command of Jesus is clear, and our cultural obsession with everything but God is obvious. However, how do you seek first the kingdom of God? How do we love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength? There is no need to overcomplicate it: give Him first place in everything!

Part II of Jesus’ answer:

- Love your neighbor as yourself.

Paul repeats this idea in Philippians 2:3-4, *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

Jesus knows it is easy to say, “I love God with all I am!” Who would really know if that statement was valid or not? But when you love your neighbor in a profound and sacrificial manner, when you love others well, your love of God becomes apparent to the world.

Jesus is giving a call to serve, care for, think of, reach out to, listen to, provide for, feed, clothe, shelter, and give to others. A traditional and historical component of the Christian life is consistency in giving your life away in love for others.

There are remarkable biographies of men and women who loved others well: Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, C.S. Lewis, Adoniram Judson, Charles Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, J.C. Ryle, Hudson Taylor, George Muller, David Brainerd, Mary Slessor, Gladys Aylward, Corrie ten Boom, Amy Carmichael, Fanny Crosby, Joni Eareckson Tada, and Sojourner Truth. If you are looking for a picture of what loving others looks like, consider reading these biographies. These individuals represent various generations. Each has individualized challenges yet have a common thread of loving God with all their heart.

The external practice of loving others and caring for them as you care for yourself is a non-negotiable component of the Christian life, just like loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

When thinking about obedience to this command of Jesus, consider these questions:

- How am I most suited to love others?
- Where am I most needed to love others?
- Where is my time currently being invested, and how can that time investment be better turned into opportunities to love others?

Our church provides tremendous opportunities to put this kind of love into action through local missions with whom we partner. You can be the hands and feet of Jesus in a very tangible way by loving others in our city.

✦ What Is The Sustaining Commandment?

JOHN 15:4-5 *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."*

This is among one of the last lessons Jesus taught His disciples the night before He was crucified. The language of Jesus is powerful. Unless you abide in Christ, you cannot be fruitful. Your life will result in nothing for the Lord. However, if you master abiding in Christ, you will be one of those that bear much fruit.

Andrew Murray was a pastor and prolific writer from South Africa. In 1864, he wrote a classic work titled, *Abide in Christ*. Murray pointed out that Jesus' command to His early disciples revolved around two words. They were *"follow Me."* But as His departure from earth grew closer, Jesus wove three critical words into His directions for His disciples. *"Abide in Me."* This was His sustaining commandment.⁵

Murray explores two ideas about experiencing the reality of abiding in Christ. First, the idea of abiding in Christ is something to be developed over time. It is not something that is non-existent one day and fully formed the next. He also writes about the need for thinking deeply and consistently on this idea. The number of agricultural metaphors used in Scripture help point us to a fuller understanding of abiding in Christ.⁶

Murray writes, "Therefore, my brother, who would learn to abide in Jesus, take time each day, ere you read and while you read, and after you read, to put yourself into living contact with the living Jesus, to yield yourself distinctly and consciously to his blessed influence."⁷

A few years ago, my wife bought a two-inch little seedling that was supposed to become a beautiful flaming red-leafed tree. For the first year, that little plant stayed on the windowsill in our kitchen. After another year, it was nearing 3 feet tall. That is when we transplanted it to our front yard. Each year it grew another 18 inches or so. After five years, I needed to put support stakes around the now 10-foot-tall but totally unstable tree. After eight years I took the stakes down because the trunk was now 6 inches at the base, and it was over 20 feet tall, with so many branches and leaves. Finally, last fall, the little tree blossomed at the top with a huge splash of red to pink flowers. As it flowered, we began to see what kind of beautiful tree it was. To see the two-inch seedling become a 20' flowering tree took a process that covered almost nine years. That is a picture of abiding in Christ. Abiding is not something that happens overnight nor over a month or even a year.

Paul writes in Galatians 6:9-10, "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*"

The harvest occurs after the planting, the watering, the caring for the field, and the seasonal rains while abiding. Let us not grow weary!

✦ What is the Animating Commandment?

MATTHEW 28:19-20 *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Carl Norden was a Swiss engineer obsessed with the math and physics problems surrounding the accurate dropping of a bomb in WWII. Before GPS or global mapping, this was back when the one phone in your home had a crank and attached to a wall in the dining room. He developed the Norden Mark 15 bombsight that was supposed to be able to "hit a pickle bucket from 20,000 feet." It worked fairly well in perfect conditions. But in real life, the bombsight broke down constantly because it was incredibly difficult and complicated to use.⁸

Bombardiers frantically tried to log in coordinates while gunfire and shells exploded around them. One of the key factors for accuracy demanded a visual sighting of the target, something

that was next to impossible as the planes flew higher and faster under cloudy and impaired vision days. Therefore, the Norden bombsight was only about 10% effective under actual battle conditions. It was a failure.⁹

Bob McNabb, in his book, *Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World*, says this.

“Is spiritual multiplication, making disciples, doomed like the Norden bombsight? Is making disciples something that works in closed church or school environments but fails in the real world? Is making disciples something that is too complicated, something that might happen in a church, but not in the chaos of my work or family.”¹⁰

God has not given us a complicated, malfunctioning command. Rather, His Word is clear on how to make disciples, practically. We make disciples as we focus on the three actions of the Great Commission.

Going - This is not simply a one weekend, one week, one month experience. This is a continual attitude and a consistent action. It would be more accurate to call this a “going” lifestyle. Everywhere we go, every conversation we join in, every new relationship we make is grounded in the single focus of making disciples. We are loving, listening, serving, and, of course, sharing the Gospel message as we are going through this life. The focus is to be intently mindful of the precious treasure of salvation in Christ that we carry within this earthen vessel of our lives. Paul reminds us, however, that although this treasure is within us, it is to demonstrate the surpassing power of God, not something that is from ourselves (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Baptizing - Baptism is a step of obedience. This is something that we encourage all believers to do quickly as soon as they make a profession of faith in Christ. Baptism is publicly demonstrating what God has done privately in your heart. Baptism is sharing your testimony with others; it brings people into the life of the church, strengthening their understanding of their inclusion in the body of Christ. Baptism is a picture of a person joining a team and is part of making disciples.

Teaching – Not all have the spiritual gift of teaching. However, all who follow the Lord are called to teach others the things that Jesus commanded. In your daily life and with your words, you can teach others to make the kingdom of God the driving priority in life. Teach them to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Teach them to love others as they love themselves. Teach them what you have learned about abiding in Christ. Teach them what you understand about making disciples.

The book of Acts explains how the disciples of Jesus practiced the commands listed above. The church was birthed, lives were changed, and new believers were mentored.

+ Conclusion

The above are practical and important components of the Christian life as seen through the commands of Christ. As we seek first the Kingdom of God, love the Lord with everything we are,

love others well, and abide in Christ, disciples will be made. Therefore, God will be honored and seen. Let your daily life and your words of truth be the best lesson to others.

May we all one day hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Helpful resources to consider in your quest to obedience to make disciples.

- *Making Sense of God* by Timothy Keller
- *Abide in Christ* by Andrew Murray
- *Spiritual Growth in the Real World* by Bob McNabb.
- *Growing Up – How to be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* by Robby Gallaty.

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¹ Steven Covey, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Simon and Schuster 1990.

² <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/heart-john-calvin>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cite for Augustine quote

⁵ Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*, 1864, Whitaker House, 1979.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://hiawathabible.org/abide-christ-preface>

⁸ Bob McNabb, *Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World*, Multiplication Press, 2013, p. 24.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.