

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

Practicing The Way – Week 3

Spiritual formation Part 2: Intentional discipleship

**Luke 6:40, 46-49** – Building our lives on solid ground

### **Building on the Rock: Becoming True Disciples of Jesus**

If anyone here had signed up for The Bath Half marathon and had diligently prepared by reading dietary advice, along with reading through a list of exercises to help get their bodies into the appropriate condition to cope with the challenges that await them, but then stopped with their preparation at the reading stage, by now they'll most likely be crawling their way across the Pulteney Bridge on their hands and knees begging anyone with a sympathetic ear to show mercy by carrying them home!

To some extent, this is an illustration of what happens in our spiritual life. We set off with good intentions to follow Jesus by reading through the scriptures, praying and coming to church, but then fail to apply the teaching to our everyday lives. Then we can often find ourselves ill-equipped to cope with the challenges that inevitably will come our way as we progress through life.

We're going to look together at this short passage in Luke, whilst incorporating some of the themes from the healthily challenging series on Practising the Way, which I hope we're all engaging with in our homegroups.

As the series begins to unfold, we're given an awareness of the fact that, with every waking moment, there are many unintentional forces which influence our characters and behaviour. We are encouraged, therefore, to commit to being intentional about the people we are becoming by subjecting ourselves to the right influences.

To help with our desire to practise the way of Jesus, we need to organise our lives accordingly. We need to establish a daily prayer rhythm, and we need to spend time in scripture and personal reflection. To become like Jesus, we need to spend time with Jesus, and we need to follow his example by doing what he did, not just reading what he said!

In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks each one of us a challenging question: *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"*

It's a question that forces us to reflect on the **genuineness of our faith**.

Are we truly following Jesus, or are we just giving him lip service? Are we actively **practising His way**, or are we merely listening to his words without letting them transform us?

This morning, I'd like to explore what it means for us to **build our lives on the solid foundation of Christ**, using Jesus' parable of the two builders we've heard in our Gospel passage, along with insights from the appropriate chapter in John Mark Comer's book, *Practicing the Way*.

Comer challenges us to see true discipleship as more than just belief—it's an intentional way of **being formed into Christ's image**.

In **Luke 6:40**, Jesus says: *"The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher."*

*"Everyone who is **fully trained** will be **like** their teacher"*

Jesus is making it clear: discipleship **is about becoming like Him**. In Comer's book, he defines discipleship in modern terminology as an apprenticeship, meaning we are to follow Jesus closely, learn from Him, and **do what He did**.

Many of us have been conditioned to think of Christianity as simply **believing in Jesus**. We hear his words; we pray the prayer of acceptance, we attend church and, despite our sinful natures, the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ensures we have eternal life with him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

And the wonderful thing is, all that is true, but Jesus invites us into something much deeper. Until we are received home, we are called to bring the Kingdom into the places we inhabit in our day to day lives. We are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world. We are to make a positive impact in the world by embodying the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

**In other words, we need to bear witness to the character of Jesus.**

This, of course, is easier said than done, in a world which can so often appear to be increasingly turning its back in favour of contrasting values. We must remember, however, that not everyone who lived 2000 years ago was like Jesus! Society then was just as flawed as it is now. In much the same way as today, people then had little understanding of the identity of the living God, so he was met with hostility.

Jesus came to offer full reconciliation **and** to teach them AND US a better way to live. We've now been given the great commission of going out to make disciples of all nations, which means that **our** salvation shouldn't be merely **transactional**, but it should be more **transformative**. **It isn't** just about gaining knowledge—**it's about living out what we learn**. A disciple is someone who doesn't just sit in church and listen to sermons but actually, through **conscious effort**, obeys the words of Jesus.

As Dallas Willard puts it:

“Grace isn’t opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning”

We know there’s nothing we can do to earn God’s gifts of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. They’re freely given and are available to each one of us without exception. That’s what grace is! In loving response, however, we strive to allow the Holy Spirit to reshape our character. By practising the way of Christ, we gradually become **transformed into his likeness**. Then, and only then, can we wholeheartedly take part in his mission, serving, loving and spreading the Gospel.

So, in verse 46, when Jesus asks: *"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"*

It’s a serious indictment. It’s easy to **say** that we follow Jesus, but **do** our lives actually reflect his teachings? Do we obey him when obedience comes at a cost?

If we’re completely honest:

- Many Christians know what Jesus says about **forgiveness** but how easy to hold a grudge!
- We know what He says about **serving others**, but we often prioritise our own comfort and convenience.
- We know what He says about **generosity**, but we cling to our money, our spare time and possessions.
- We know what he says about **loving our enemies**, but, just occasionally, don’t we feel that our feelings of anger and resentment are fully justified?

Jesus is saying that **calling Him "Lord" is not enough**—our lives must reflect our confession.

John Mark Comer warns that **we often confuse knowledge with spiritual maturity**. Just because we **know** what Jesus teaches doesn't mean we are actually following him. Information alone doesn't change us—**practise does**.

For example, as I touched on earlier, if you read a book on healthy eating but never change your diet, will you get healthier? Sadly not! In the same way, knowing Scripture without applying it does not lead to transformation.

James 1:22 reinforces this truth: *"Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*

The deception that James speaks of has always existed in the Church of God. Six hundred years before Jesus, in the book of Ezekiel, we read this:

*"My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practise. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain", (Ezekiel 33:31).*

In adoration and respect for my Grandfather-in-law Gordon Roberts who, now in his 90s, very happily remains a Baptist minister living in Dorset, I'm going to pop back to the mid-nineteenth century to quote some J.C. Ryle who, in his own inimitable way, puts the lack of practical application to the wisdom of scripture like this:

*“It is a disease which has never ceased to prevail all over Christendom. It is a soul-ruining plague, which is continually sweeping away crowds of Gospel-hearers down the broad way to destruction. Open sin and avowed unbelief no doubt slay their thousands. But profession without practise slays its tens of thousands”*

If we don't practise the teachings of Jesus, we are deceiving ourselves. “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”, (James 2:17)

In today's reading we find Jesus emphasising this warning with his parable of the two builders. **The wise builder** digs deep and lays his foundation on solid rock. When storms come, his house stands firm. **The foolish builder** builds without a foundation. When the storm comes, his house collapses.

The difference between these two builders is **not that one hears Jesus' words and the other doesn't** — they both hear Jesus' words!

The difference is that the wise builder **puts Jesus' words into practise**.

Building on the rock means:

- Consistently practising the teachings of Jesus
- Daily obedience, even when it's hard.
- Developing spiritual disciplines that strengthen our faith

Notice that **both houses face storms**. Following Jesus doesn't mean life will be easy. The difference is that **those who build their houses on rock by cultivating a deep relationship with Jesus will remain strong in the storm,**

**while those who merely attend church without transformation often find their faith crumbling in hardship.**

So how **do** we ensure that we're building our lives on a solid foundation?

I suggest **four practical ways** for us to take away with us this morning. I'll read through them and then I'll go through each one in a little more detail. They are:

- 1. Develop a Daily Rhythm of Being with Jesus**
- 2. Engage in Spiritual Disciplines**
- 3. Obey Jesus in the Small Things**
- 4. Surround Yourself with Like-Minded Disciples**

Throughout this sermon series, there is a strong emphasis that spiritual growth doesn't just happen by accident. We must be intentional. Without making a conscious decision to engage in these four practical ways of living, there is very little capacity for us to be formed by anything other than what we allow the world to throw at us. Everything that we are subjected to influences who we are: our environment, the people we spend time with, the things we read, the things we watch on TV or hear on the radio. Many of our daily experiences are unavoidable. We all live very much in the real world. This is how it should be: we are all called to bring a little of God's Kingdom into the places we inhabit. By intentionally practising the way of Jesus, however, we give ourselves every opportunity not to be formed solely by the unhealthy influences we are constantly subjected to.

So, let's expand a little on each one of these. If I'm honest, I'm not ticking too many of these boxes!

### 1. Develop a Daily Rhythm of Being with Jesus

- Spend time in **prayer**, listening to God.
- Read **Scripture daily**, not just for knowledge but for transformation.
- Practice **silence and solitude**, slowing down to be in God's presence.

**When the noise of life is relentless, the still small voice of calm is very easily drowned out and becomes inaudible.**

### 2. Engage in Spiritual Disciplines

Helpful spiritual disciplines can include:

- Fasting: as well as well-documented health benefits, fasting can help us draw near to God and prepare ourselves with determination to do God's will. However, this comes with a disclaimer: please read around the subject first, rather than just stop eating!
- Sabbath rest: my personal favourite!

It is essential that we take regular breaks to reset our souls and keep us on track. How is it possible to engage deeply with anything when we're hurtling through life relentlessly at breakneck speed?



Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, (Exodus 20:8)

- Simplicity - is there anything we can let go of to render life less complicated or demanding?
- Community – embrace the idea of living in community. We're at our best when we engage with one another; when we look out for one another and willingly help out when needed, expecting nothing in return.

When we practice these spiritual disciplines regularly, we create space for the Holy Spirit to transform us.

### **3. Obey Jesus in the Small Things**

Transformation happens in the **daily decisions** we make:

- Choosing to forgive
- Serving when it's inconvenient
- Giving generously
- Speaking kindly when we'd far rather be lashing out!

### **4. Surround Yourself with Like-Minded Disciples**

- Find a **community of believers** who push us in the right direction towards real and meaningful growth.
- Join a **homegroup**.
- Be accountable to others in your spiritual walk.

So, to conclude, Jesus' parable challenges us with a choice:

- Will we remain passive and simply be **hearers** of the Word only, or will we be **doers**?
- Will we **build on rock** by practising Jesus' way, or on **sand** by merely listening?

Are there areas of our lives where we call Jesus, "Lord", but don't obey Him? As we progress through this sermon series, we are given the tools we need to lay a firmer foundation upon which we **can** build a life of true discipleship through greater obedience to Jesus. By doing so, we'll find ourselves gradually becoming transformed into his likeness.

It might be fitting to leave the last word to John Mark Comer, who says this, *"We don't wake up one day and magically become like Jesus. We become like Him through thousands of small choices to follow him every day."*