

5-Day Daily Bible Study

Chapters 5 and 6 Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus

Day 1: The Church as the Primary Discipler

Scripture Reading: John 13:34–35 (ESV)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Context and Commentary: John 13:34–35, spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper (circa AD 30), introduces a “new commandment” rooted in His sacrificial love, exemplified by His impending death on the cross (cf. John 15:13). The Greek “kathōs” (“just as”) indicates that Jesus’ self-giving love sets the standard for disciples’ love for one another. Given in the intimate setting of the upper room, this command emphasizes communal love as a visible witness to the world, distinguishing disciples from others. Hermeneutically, the passage underscores that the church’s corporate life—marked by sacrificial love—serves as a primary means of discipling believers by reflecting Christ’s character and fostering spiritual growth. Dever cites this passage to argue that the local church, through its love, is the primary discipler of Christians.

Illustration: A family meal where love binds members, like a church’s love nurturing disciples, illustrates the church’s role in discipling. Imagine a family gathered around the dinner table, where parents and siblings share stories of their day, offer support during challenges, and celebrate joys together, creating a warm, trusting environment. This setting allows each family member to learn from others’ experiences, grow in character, and feel valued, strengthening family bonds. Similarly, the church’s love—expressed through shared worship, mutual care, praying together, or hosting meals—creates a nurturing environment where members grow in faith, learning to follow Jesus by observing and participating in a community shaped by His sacrificial love, thus discipling one another through everyday interactions.

Reflection: In Chapter 5, Dever asserts that the local church is the “natural environment” for discipling, contrasting it with parachurch ministries that cannot fully replace the church’s role. He critiques churches lacking a discipling culture, where members fail to engage in mutual growth through love, hospitality, or mentoring, leaving new believers unsupported. John 13:34–35 illustrates how the church’s love displays Christ, discipling members by example and accountability. Dever’s emphasis on the church as the “basic discipler” challenges us to prioritize church life over isolated efforts, fostering a community where love shapes disciples. This love, seen in acts like inviting a new member to lunch or counseling a struggling believer, mirrors Jesus’ sacrifice and equips believers to grow together, making the church a foretaste of heaven’s

“world of love.”

Christological Point: Jesus’ sacrificial love, culminating in the cross, is the model for the church’s discipling love.

Ecclesiological Focus: The church disciplines through corporate love, expressed in gatherings and relationships, making it the primary context for spiritual growth where members reflect Christ’s love.

Questions:

1. How does “just as I have loved you” (v. 34) define the church’s love?
2. Why is love a public witness of discipleship (v. 35)?

Theological Questions:

3. Why is the church the primary discipler of believers?
4. How does corporate love reflect God’s Trinitarian nature?

Application Questions:

5. What specific act of love can you show a church member this week to disciple them?
6. How can your church foster a culture of discipling through love?

Daily Assignment: Identify a church member to encourage with a specific act of love (e.g., a note, prayer, or meal invitation). Reflect in a journal on how this act contributes to the church’s discipling culture.

Day 2: Gathering for Discipling

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Context and Commentary: Hebrews 10:24–25, written to Jewish Christians facing persecution (circa AD 64–68), urges steadfastness in community amid pressures to revert to Judaism. The Greek “paroxysmos” (“stir up”) implies intentional provocation to love and good works, while “not neglecting to meet together” addresses the temptation to abandon gatherings due to hostility or fear. The “Day” refers to Christ’s return, adding eschatological urgency to corporate worship. Hermeneutically, this passage emphasizes that regular church gatherings are essential for discipling, as they provide a context for mutual encouragement and spiritual growth through shared worship, preaching, and fellowship. Dever uses this to highlight the church’s discipling role through gathering.

Illustration: Runners pacing each other in a marathon, like church gatherings spurring members to love, vividly captures the dynamic of communal discipling. Picture a group of runners in a grueling marathon, where each encourages the others to keep moving forward, shouting words of motivation, sharing water at aid stations, or even slowing to help a struggling teammate. This mutual support ensures each runner perseveres, drawing strength from the group to reach the finish line. Similarly, church gatherings—whether Sunday worship, small groups, or prayer meetings—create a space where members “pace” one another through hearing God’s Word, praying together, and sharing life, spurring each other toward love and good works, thus discipling one another in faith through communal encouragement.

Reflection: In Chapter 5, Dever stresses that the church disciplines through its gatherings, as Hebrews 10:24–25 shows, where members intentionally encourage one another toward love and good works. He critiques churches where members neglect gatherings, undermining discipling by missing opportunities for mutual growth. Dever’s insight that regular meetings “give shape” to following Jesus challenges us to view attendance not as a ritual but as a vital discipling act that fosters spiritual maturity. Gatherings provide opportunities to hear God’s Word, pray together, and build relationships, creating a culture where members help each other grow in Christlikeness. This communal act of gathering strengthens the church’s role as a discipling community, equipping believers to live out their faith together in anticipation of Christ’s return.

Christological Point: Jesus’ presence in gatherings (Matt. 18:20) empowers mutual discipling and encouragement.

Ecclesiological Focus: The church’s regular gatherings are central to discipling, providing a structured context for mutual encouragement and accountability that fosters spiritual growth.

Questions:

1. What does “stir up one another” (v. 24) imply about the church’s communal responsibility?
2. Why is “not neglecting to meet” (v. 25) essential for discipling?

Theological Questions:

3. How do corporate gatherings reflect God’s design for discipling?
4. Why is eschatological hope tied to the church’s gatherings?

Application Questions:

5. How can you prepare for church gatherings to actively disciple others?
6. Who in your church can you encourage to attend gatherings regularly?

Daily Assignment: Attend a church gathering this week (e.g., worship service or small group). Prepare by praying for one member to encourage during the meeting and follow up with them afterward to discuss a sermon point or pray together.

Day 3: The Church's Authority Structure

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18:15–20 (ESV)

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

Context and Commentary: Matthew 18:15–20, part of Jesus' discourse on kingdom community (circa AD 30), outlines a process for addressing sin within the church, culminating in discipline. The steps—private confrontation, small group intervention, and church involvement—reflect Deuteronomy 19:15's principle of establishing charges with witnesses. The terms “bind and loose” (v. 18) denote the church's authority to affirm or disaffirm a profession of faith, acting as heaven's representative. Jesus' promise of His presence “where two or three are gathered” (v. 20) assures divine support for this authority. Hermeneutically, this passage establishes the church's authority structure as essential for discipling, ensuring accountability and holiness by clarifying who is a disciple. Dever cites this to show the church's role in affirming disciples through discipline.

Illustration: A referee enforcing rules for a fair game, like the church's authority ensuring accountability, illustrates the importance of structure in discipling. Imagine a soccer match where the referee vigilantly enforces the rules, issuing warnings for minor fouls, consulting other officials for serious infractions, and, if necessary, removing a player who persistently disrupts the game. This structure ensures the match remains fair and enjoyable, protecting the integrity of the team's play. Similarly, the church's authority structure, through the steps of discipline outlined in Matthew 18, ensures that members live out their faith consistently, correcting sin lovingly to restore individuals or, in extreme cases, excluding them to protect the community's witness. This framework supports discipling by clarifying who is committed to Christ, enabling meaningful, accountable relationships.

Reflection: In Chapter 5, Dever emphasizes that the church's authority structure, as outlined in Matthew 18, provides a critical context for discipling by affirming who is a disciple through accountability and discipline. He contrasts this with unaccountable friendships, which lack the formal responsibility of church membership, making it harder to discern true believers. Dever's insight that the church “binds and looses” highlights discipline as a discipling act, not punishment, fostering a community where sin is addressed lovingly to promote repentance and growth. This structure supports one-on-one discipling by providing a framework where believers know who is part of the covenant community, enabling relationships that uphold the church's holiness and mission to make disciples.

Christological Point: Jesus' authority and presence (v. 20) undergird the church's discipling authority, ensuring its decisions align with heaven's will.

Ecclesiological Focus: The church's authority to affirm or disaffirm professions of faith through discipline creates a structured environment where discipling thrives, ensuring accountability and holiness within the covenant community.

Questions:

1. What does "bind and loose" (v. 18) imply about the church's authority?
2. How does Jesus' presence (v. 20) support the church's discipling role?

Theological Questions:

3. Why does God entrust the church with disciplinary authority?
4. How does discipline enhance the church's discipling mission?

Application Questions:

5. How can you support your church's authority structure in discipling?
6. How can you lovingly address sin in a church member's life?

Daily Assignment: Reflect on a time you witnessed or experienced church discipline. Journal how it fostered spiritual growth, and pray for wisdom to support your church's accountability structure.

Day 4: Pastors' Role in Teaching and Ordinances

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:11–16 (ESV)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Context and Commentary: Ephesians 4:11–16, written by Paul from prison (circa AD 60–62), describes Christ's gifts of leaders to the church to equip believers for ministry. "Shepherds and teachers" (likely one role, pastors) are tasked with equipping the saints, leading to unity, maturity, and stability against false teaching. The Greek "katartismos" ("equip") implies preparing believers for service, while "speaking the truth in love" (v. 15) emphasizes growth through truthful, loving teaching. Hermeneutically, this passage highlights pastors' role in discipling through teaching God's Word and administering ordinances, enabling the church to grow in Christlikeness. Dever cites this to show pastors' responsibility to teach and lead in ordinances for discipling.

Illustration: A chef training apprentices to prepare a feast, like pastors equipping members through teaching and ordinances, captures the equipping role. Imagine a master chef in a busy kitchen, patiently teaching apprentices how to select the freshest ingredients, follow complex recipes, and present dishes beautifully, ensuring they can eventually cook independently. The chef also oversees special dishes, like a signature dessert, that mark the meal's significance, similar to ordinances like baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the same way, pastors teach God's Word through sermons, Bible studies, and personal counsel, equipping members to disciple others, while administering ordinances that visually proclaim the gospel, reinforcing the church's discipling mission and fostering maturity among believers.

Reflection: In Chapter 6, Dever emphasizes that pastors disciple by teaching God's Word, both in corporate worship and personal settings, and by leading in ordinances like baptism and the Lord's Supper. He cites Ephesians 4 to show that pastors equip members to build up the body in love, enabling them to disciple others. Dever's example of elders interviewing baptismal candidates illustrates how ordinances affirm faith, creating a discipling environment where believers are identified and nurtured. His warning against churches lacking biblical teaching challenges us to value pastors' Word-centered ministry, which nourishes all discipling relationships. This equips the church to grow as a unified, mature body, where members are prepared to disciple others through teaching, example, and participation in ordinances.

Christological Point: Christ, the head of the body, equips the church through pastors to grow into His fullness (v. 15).

Ecclesiological Focus: The church relies on pastors to teach the Word and administer ordinances, creating a discipling culture where members are equipped for ministry and mutual growth.

Questions:

1. How does “equipping the saints” (v. 12) relate to discipling?
2. What does “speaking the truth in love” (v. 15) imply for pastoral teaching?

Theological Questions:

3. Why does Christ give pastors to the church for discipling?
4. How do ordinances contribute to spiritual maturity?

Application Questions:

5. How can you support your pastors’ teaching and ordinance leadership?
6. How can you use their teaching to disciple another member?

Daily Assignment: Listen to a recent sermon from your church. Take notes and share one insight with a church member, discussing how it applies to discipling.

Day 5: Members' Mutual Responsibility

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 (ESV)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Context and Commentary: 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, written by Paul to the Corinthian church (circa AD 54–55), uses the body metaphor to address divisions and emphasize unity in diversity. The “one body” reflects the church’s unity through baptism in the Spirit (v. 13), transcending social barriers (Jews, Greeks, slaves, free). Each member’s unique role, arranged by God (v. 18), contributes to the body’s health, with mutual care preventing division (v. 25). Hermeneutically, this passage underscores that members’ mutual responsibility—caring for one another—fosters discipling within the church by ensuring all contribute to spiritual growth. Dever cites this to highlight members’ responsibility to disciple one another, building a culture of mutual care.

Illustration: A symphony orchestra where each musician’s part creates harmony, like church members caring for one another, illustrates mutual responsibility in discipling. Picture an orchestra where violinists, flutists, and percussionists each play distinct roles, yet their coordinated efforts produce a beautiful symphony. If one musician falters, others adjust to support them, ensuring the performance succeeds. Similarly, church members, with diverse gifts and roles, care for one another—through encouragement, prayer, or practical help—creating a harmonious community where each person’s contribution fosters spiritual growth. This mutual care ensures that every member, from the “weaker” to the “honorable,” disciplines others by sharing in the body’s life.

Reflection: In Chapter 6, Dever emphasizes that church members are responsible for one another, using the body metaphor from 1 Corinthians 12 to show how mutual care fosters discipling. He highlights that members must love, encourage, and spur one another to growth, as

seen in acts like sharing burdens or studying Scripture together. Dever's insight that this responsibility occurs within the church's corporate context challenges us to see membership as a commitment to disciple others, not just receive teaching. By caring for one another—rejoicing with the joyful, weeping with the suffering—members build a discipling culture where everyone contributes to the body's health, ensuring spiritual growth is the norm. This mutual responsibility strengthens the church as a community where disciples help each other follow Jesus.

Christological Point: Christ, as the head, unifies the body, enabling members to care for one another in discipling.

Ecclesiological Focus: The church, as a body of diverse members, fosters discipling through mutual care and responsibility, ensuring all contribute to spiritual growth within the covenant community.

Questions:

1. How does the “one body” metaphor (v. 12) reflect the church's unity?
2. What does “the same care for one another” (v. 25) imply for discipling?

Theological Questions:

3. Why does God design the church as a body for discipling?
4. How does mutual care reflect the gospel?

Application Questions:

5. How can you care for a church member to help them grow in faith?
6. How can you use your gifts to disciple others in your church?

Daily Assignment: Identify a church member who needs encouragement or support. Reach out to them with a specific act (e.g., prayer, a conversation) and journal how this reflects mutual discipling.