

## Surprise The World

### Week 5 ~ Chapter 6: Learn

I mentioned during a recent Discipleship Moment that EAT was my favorite habit mentioned in this book. But this week's habit, LEARN, is probably the easiest for me...or the one that has been habituated the most in me (Let's face it, my job lends towards it). But what about you?

- *Which of these habits that we've looked at so far is easiest for you, and which is most challenging? What's already a habit for you, and which one(s) will take considerable effort to develop into a habit?*

My personal observation of the fine folks of CUMC would suggest that BLESS seems to come pretty easily and naturally to many of y'all. Blessing others seems to be a habit, a way of life, for many...which is really great!

In Dallas Willard's classic book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, he notes in the opening paragraph, "*My hope is to gain a fresh hearing for Jesus, especially among those who believe they already understand Him. In His case, quite frankly, presumed familiarity has led to unfamiliarity, unfamiliarity has led to contempt, and contempt has led to profound ignorance.*" In other words, Jesus is so familiar that He's actually unfamiliar, particularly to those who claim devotion to Him. We think we know and understand Him better than we actually do. The habit outlined in this chapter of *Surprise The World* is designed to address that problem.

In this chapter, Frost advocates "Learning Christ" by immersing ourselves in the Gospels so that we would know what Jesus would want us to think/know, be, and do in our everyday lives. Just yesterday (Sunday, Oct 20, 2024) guest preacher Jill Moffett encouraged us to "*Give them Jesus.*" That's great! It does, however, assume that we know Jesus well. And that's what this week's habit is all about. (Frost is right to quickly point out that we don't exclude the rest of Scripture in this pursuit.)

As I reflect on this chapter, I think it might be helpful for us to think beyond books and classrooms when we think about learning. Yes, the chapter advocates (as do I) really leaning into Scripture, and particularly the Gospel accounts. But, there's a difference between reading and processing/internalizing. Or to say it another way, there's reading to gain knowledge/information, and then there's reading for the sake of transformation. Information alone does NOT lead to transformation. And "learning Christ" is about transformation.

Additionally, it's easy for us, as Westerners, to think about reading and learning too individualistically. While the work of transformation requires some individual effort and responsibility, it is ultimately a communal activity. Or another way to say it, LOVE is the goal of transformation, and RELATIONSHIPS are both the measurement and the "classroom", the "laboratory", the context of love. And we LEARN love from Jesus...He is the epitome, the personification of love, which is why we turn to Him to LEARN.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux perhaps said it best when he said...

*“There are those who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge; that is Curiosity.  
There are those who seek knowledge to be known by others; that is Vanity.  
There are those who seek knowledge in order to serve; that is Love.”*

That’s the sort of motivation for learning that will *Surprise The World*.

- *Share something you learned recently. How did you come to learn that? What was your motivation for learning it?*
- *Describe something you’ve learned that was life-changing. What was the process behind you learning it? (Was it quick and easy...or long and painful...what’s the story there?)*
- *What’s something you learned about Jesus recently? And/or, what’s something you learned about Jesus or from Jesus that was paradigm-shifting?*

While we’re on the subject of Learning, I’d like to take a moment to highlight how we at CUMC have been endeavoring to do exactly what this chapter promotes over the past few years. Over the past two years, during the season of Lent, we’ve gone through a Gospel (Luke in 2023; John in 2024; Mark is on the docket for 2025). Also, in 2023 we spent significant time in Acts (which is really Luke part two), and we spent a large amount of 2024 going through the Sermon on the Mount (the most quintessential of Jesus’ teachings).

Likewise, for the past few years we’ve invited y’all to participate in Soul Training Exercises, which essentially is learning Jesus by spending time with Jesus...just with a variety of different topics to consider with Him or exercises/practices to do with Him. Or as I keep saying...

- Be with Jesus
- Become like Jesus
- Do as Jesus did

And let us not forget Table Groups...our weekly opportunities to have Christ-centered conversations in community, where we learn Christ and find belonging. Table Groups are designed to promote apprenticeship to Jesus and embodying what it means to be family in Christ. Learning Christ has been, and will continue to be, our primary aim at CUMC...which fits our mission *“To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”*

Last week’s habit (LISTEN) and this week’s habit (LEARN) go best together (like chocolate and peanut butter; like peanut butter and jelly; like cookies and milk). Um, I need to take a break...I just made myself hungry...

...OK, I’m back. (I told you eating was my favorite.)

But seriously, the way we make sure that Learning isn’t just an intellectual or academic exercise is by coupling it with Listening. The most important relationship we’re trying to develop is our relationship with Jesus. We connect with Jesus through prayer and Scripture. The reason it’s so important to keep them together is because it is very easy to develop a concept/construct of

Jesus that is more culturally informed or based more from our imagination than what is Biblically accurate. There is a very real danger of creating a Jesus in our own image, where “Jesus” likes and dislikes, endorses and denounces, all the same things we do. This is why Learning Christ from Scripture is so important. As apprentices of Jesus, we adjust and adapt to Him, not Him to us. We are desiring to be conformed to His likeness, not deform Him to ours. Jesus is not our mascot; He’s our master.

This phenomenon also happens collectively, as we’re seeing with the rise of Christian Nationalism...a “Christianity” that looks nothing like a Biblically-informed following of Jesus but is being touted as a “Jesus is on our side.” way. Friends, we need to be more concerned about whether we’re on His side, caring about and prioritizing what’s important to Him, and not concerned about whether He’s on ours. That kind of thinking/acting is a travesty. One of the best ways to avoid it is by being well educated in the way of Jesus, which we get from Scripture, primarily from the Gospels, as well as from apprentices/disciples throughout history whose work and words are still with us.

- *Who do you know, or who can you think of, who claims to follow Jesus but whose understanding of Jesus you find to be rather suspect, selective, or deficient? This question is about being discerning, not judgmental. So in that vein, let’s also ask ourselves: How is my own understanding of Jesus selective or deficient?*
- *What about Jesus would you like to understand better? If you could ask Jesus a question, what would you ask Him? (That’s sort of a trick question because you can, in fact, ask Him...though you may have to do some waiting, listening, and learning before you get an answer.)*

I greatly appreciate the C.S. Lewis quote that Frost includes in this chapter...

*“In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw [people] into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him.”*

Lewis is referring to Colossians 1:16-18 which reads, *“For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”*, and Ephesians 1:9-10, *“[God] has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure that He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.”*

The quote from Lewis is found in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*. If you don’t have it as part of your library, I would strongly recommend it. We can rightly say that C.S. Lewis had “High Christology, baby!” (And to think, at one point Lewis was an avowed atheist. How did he become a Christian? Through friendships/relationships. Sort of what our book *Surprise The World* is all

about. Lewis would go on to become one of the most influential Christians of the 20th century and beyond.) We could say the Lewis' friends (which included J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Hobbit*) embodied the missional habits we're discussing in this series. Lewis and his friends had common ground in literature and history. God used friendship and conversation to woo Lewis to Himself. He wants to do the same through us.

- *What do you "marinate" in? What or who do you "geek out" about? How is that forming you?*

I do want to highlight a term that Frost uses that is a good one to get our minds and hearts around. The term is "Incarnational Mission". This is an approach and posture of mission that is completely modeled after Jesus. God came "in the flesh" (which is what "incarnational" means) in Jesus. He went to where we were; He did not wait for us to go to Him. He was present and known. This is a pattern for us to follow. We don't wait for people to "come to church". Rather, we go to where they are...which is really where we already are/go (our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our various associations and affiliations, our activities, our kid's activities... wherever there are people, as we are there we represent Jesus and think, say, act, as He would.)

We "learn Christ" so that we can represent Him well in all the various spheres and arenas of our life. In the relationships/friendships we have, people have the opportunity to see Christ in us. You and I are walking, talking, living, breathing billboards for the Kingdom of God. Through our relationships/friendships, people have the opportunity to see something surprising in us and to ask questions.

- *Where do you spend your time? With whom do you spend your time? How might you allow yourself to be more present and known in those places and with those people?*
- *How does the "incarnational mission" approach/posture compare to other ways you've seen or conceived of being a "missionary"?*

I'd like to close this week by highlighting some resources and ideas for learning that you might find helpful. Obviously there are a ton of good books out there. I've already plugged *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Another book I'd recommend—as does Frost (see the appendix in the back of the book)—is *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey.

And, obviously, you know I'm going to recommend the Bible Project ([www.bibleproject.com](http://www.bibleproject.com)), SO MUCH good stuff to be found there. But you need a plan. However you go about Learning Christ, it's not going to happen by accident. This leads us to our Soul Training Exercise...

- *What sort of "diet" of Jesus (through Scripture, books (bound or audio), podcasts, apps, etc.) do you currently have? What changes or ideas did this chapter inspire in you?*

## Soul Training Exercise

As we continue to cultivate missional habits...

- Bless 3 people this week...
- Eat with 3 people this week...
- Set time aside to Listen to the Spirit/Jesus this week...

The first two habits we looked at in this series (Bless, Eat) we might call “external” habits. Last week and this week (Listen, Learn) we might call “internal” habits. And as I’ve already mentioned, listening and learning really ought to go together...as they overlap quite a bit.

Now here’s where I stray from Frost a bit. He recommends setting aside one time per week for listening and/or learning. Personally, I think it ought to be more frequent...ideally daily. Over the past few years, at various points, we’ve discussed developing a Rule (or Rhythm) of Life. For an apprentice of Jesus, daily time of listening (in prayer) and learning (from Scripture and/or other resources) with Jesus is critical for healthy formation.

So with that in mind...if this is not already a pattern/habit for you...spend some time this week coming up with a sustainable plan (a plan you can actually do...we’re not looking for Herculean effort here) that you can do on a daily basis.

For example...

- Maybe 10 minutes of Bible reading, 5 minutes of meditation/thoughtful reflection on what you’ve read, 5-10 minutes of prayer.
- Or, if you’re a reader by nature, perhaps infuse your reading time with Scripture or other Jesus-focused books.
- Listening to the Bible in audio format, or listening to an audio book or an app, is great too.

The goal is a steady diet of Jesus. So come up with a plan. Share it with a friend for accountability and encouragement.