

DISCIPLESHIP ESSENTIALS

"Being A Disciple"

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Verses from New Living Translation unless noted.



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Prayer

Note-taking outline

In part 1 of our series, we talked about the fact that Jesus' last command to his disciples was to go and make more disciples.

Matthew 28:18-20 "Jesus came and told his disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

If we as Christ followers aren't making disciples then we are not obeying his final command. Now it's true, it does require that we first be discipled ourselves.

And, I don't want anyone to make a mistake; infants, children, young adults and parents are all human beings. A young walnut tree like the one in my front yard, even though it has no walnuts on it yet, it is still 100% walnut tree.

I'm not suggesting that you are not an authentic Christ follower because you are not yet making disciples. But I am saying that every one of us needs to recognize that task as Christ's final command, and have it as our ultimate goal.

You are going to see some people walking around this church with a Follow Feet lapel pin on their clothing. I've been handing these out to everyone who has committed to a discipleship triad or quad.



The reason is to remind them of the commitment they've made. The follow feet represent our intention to fully follow Christ. In Matthew 4:19 Jesus says, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

There are three parts to Christ's challenge:

- 1) "Come, follow me" – invitation; involves your HEAD; you make a mental decision to be obedient. You decide to make Jesus Christ your Lord and choose to be his follower.
- 2) "And I will make you" – transformation; involves your HEART; you submit to his Lordship in your life and allow him to begin a transformation inside you; making you like himself.
- 3) "Fishers of men" – multiplication; involves your HANDS. You also embrace his mission of taking God's message of love and forgiveness to the world and then discipling those who respond.

That's what we learned the first week. Then in week two of our series, last week, we learned that making disciples needs to be:

- 1) Intentional – Discipleship will not happen simply with the passing of time or even consistent church attendance. Jesus demonstrated a precise method that we need to follow.
- 2) Relational – It's life on life. Growth just doesn't happen well in isolation. It happens in community; in relationship with others committed to helping us grow. We suggest quads or triads – gender specific groups of threes or fours.
- 3) Transformational – Discipleship is not about completing a course or a curriculum of study. It's about allowing the Holy Spirit to do a work of transformation in us. Making us new people; people like Christ.
- 4) Generational – Jesus intended and instructed that we are to take the things he teaches us and pass them on to others. Our ultimate goal as Christ followers is to become disciplers

– those who will take the initiative to find others that we can help grow spiritually.

Now I know that some of you may be saying, what's so different about this? Isn't this what Christians everywhere believe? Isn't this what we've been doing all along?

Well the truth is, most born again Christians in this country have never set any goal for their spiritual development; that's like playing basketball without a hoop; football without goal posts. They have no standard to measure their progress and there is no accountability.

How can we tell the difference between activity and accomplishment? We've become satisfied with the process without regard for progress.

One pastor this week told me he thinks churches in America subscribe to the simple ABC's of success. A – attendance; B – buildings; and C – cash. If you have good attendance, a nice building and good cash flow, you're a success.

The fact is, 80% of American churches are plateaued or in decline. Our need for success has been so strong that we've opted for shortcuts.

This has given us short-term numerical growth instead of mature believers. We have accepted addition instead of multiplication.

Now today I want to talk about being a disciple; what it means to submit fully to the call of Christ on our lives. Because you see, I feel like I've just struck gold. We've never had so many people around here excited about discipleship.

Today I want to describe some components and characteristics of true discipleship. None of us will be able to say that all of these perfectly describe where we are today, but rather, they will help us assess where we are spiritually and get us moving in the right direction.

The first necessity for a true disciple is to:

1ST FOLLOW FULLY – this is our forward focus

What do you suppose Peter, James and John thought of when they heard Jesus talk about being disciples? We know that John the Baptist had disciples. We know the Pharisees had disciples.

It was common for young men in their culture to be cause-oriented and follow those who inspired them. Every Jewish boy by age thirteen had studied and memorized much of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT.

If he was among the best and the brightest, he would be accepted into a rabbinical school. There he would come under the authority and tutelage of a professional teacher.

If he was not at the top of this class, he would probably drop out and return to the vocation of his family; a shepherd, fisherman, carpenter or farmer.

There were five characteristics of the rabbinical schools.

1. The disciple chose to submit to molding and mentoring of his teacher.
2. The disciple would memorize his teacher's words. Memorization was an essential because of the scarcity of writing instruments. A good teacher taught in way that were memorable; i.e. parables, stories,
3. The disciple would learn his teacher's style and methods.
4. The disciple would imitate his teacher's life.
5. The disciple would be expected to ultimately find his own students, disciples or followers, and teach them.

Becoming a disciple was a critical decision. Rabbinic tradition was very strict. Students had very little freedom, and when they completed their training, they would go on to a career as a teacher themselves.

Jesus wasn't however a product of this accepted Jewish system. And, he chose his followers from outside the system. His methods and his intention were different.

His disciples were to be brothers and they were to serve each other and others. They were not competing or seeking position and prestige.

They had only one teacher and that was Christ. They would not open a school in their own name. Their purpose was to produce more followers of Jesus.

Luke 5:27-28 says, "Later as Jesus left town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax collection booth. 'Come, be my disciple!' Jesus said to him. So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him."

One thing that immediately strikes me in this passage are the two words, "left everything." Somehow those first disciples understood the radical decision they were making to follow Jesus, especially Matthew Levi.

The other disciples could, and actually did go back to fishing at one point. But when Levi "left everything" it was guaranteed unemployment. He had a lucrative job working for the Romans.

There were, with little doubt, many standing in line to take his place. These disciples left their vocations, their plans and ambitions, their families and belongings. They also left behind their hobbies and recreational pursuits – everything. And this was just the beginning of what these men would sacrifice.

What does Jesus call us to leave behind? We too, have been called to real discipleship. This is far more than adding Sunday church attendance to our weekly schedule.

Certainly, we are called to leave ungodly habits, godless friends, profane language, and immoral lifestyles – but those are the obvious things.

According to Mark 10:29 some of us may have to leave homes, brothers, sisters, mother, father and even children for Christ. Yes some will give up their lives; they will die for Christ. I don't know about you, but I think I'm just beginning to understand true discipleship.

I pray that my commitment will grow to the level of real discipleship and that I will remember that whatever the cost, it is nothing compared to the price He paid to rescue me.

This is not as a course we take but as a direction we pursue, not as a Sunday activity but as the "set" of our heart...a new way of life.

In the Old Testament, the phrase "set of his heart" was used frequently as the reason for a king's success or failure. Rehoboam did not "set his heart on the Lord" and it led to evil (2 Chronicles 2:14). But Ezra "set his heart" to seek God and he prospered (Ezra 7:10).

Reading the account of the kings of Judah in 2 Chronicles reveals that many started well but ended poorly. Their destiny and legacy had to do with the "set" of their hearts.

Their examples illustrate that setting our hearts on the Lord is neither automatic nor permanent. I think "setting their hearts to seek the Lord" was the Old Testament version of New Testament intentional discipleship; following fully.

A true disciple must follow fully, but second

2ND **REFLECT AUTHENTICALLY** – our inward focus. A true disciple reflects Christ authentically and this begins on the inside.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." Luke 6:40 (NKJV)

For Jesus the training begins at the core of a disciple's being. Every athlete and coach knows that the "core" is essential to success regardless of the particular sport.

Strengthening and maintaining the core is a constant emphasis from the little leagues to the big leagues. Coaches and managers know that if an athlete is weak at his core, it won't be long before he is on the injured reserve list, sitting on the sidelines in street clothes watching the game.

Coaches and athletes know what is required to strengthen and maintain the core muscle groups of the body. So exercises are designed and discipline is applied to develop and maintain this core.

If we are to be true disciples, we must allow the Holy Spirit to develop and strengthen our spiritual core. Failure here and we should not be surprised to find ourselves sitting on the sidelines in street clothes....at best watching the game, but more likely not even in the stadium.

We've seen it happen to others. It can happen to us.

If we are to grow from spectators to players, from seekers to spiritual parents, discipling others, we must intentionally and effectively develop our core spiritual muscles.

As disciples we must set our hearts on Christ and not simply jump in and start serving somewhere when we are not adequately prepared. The battlefield is strewn with the bodies of people who tried to serve but not equipped.

They were talented, willing and there was a need. They were plugged into ministry of service, but eventually they collapsed from fatigue, discouragement, or disillusionment. Some keep serving but there is no passion, no spark, no fire.

Following Christ fully is a lifestyle is built around our spiritual core. If we want to stay on the spiritual playing field and not just serve snacks in the stands, we must strengthen and maintain our spiritual core.

The environment for this, creating opportunity for learning, growth, development, and encouragement is the quads and triads. Core is character; who we are inside.

Peter, one of Christ's first disciples explains, "As we know Jesus better, his divine power, gives us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself." (2 Peter 1:5-6)

Peter is retracing the path to developing a strong core; one that will be productive and useful for God's eternal kingdom. He make it clear that as we get to know Jesus better and better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life and to escape the decadence and evil desires all around us.

He exhorts us to make every effort to apply the benefits of God's promises and to work hard to fulfill our calling. If we do this the reward is great and we will never stumble or fall away.

We must work hard and make every effort – though all this goodness comes from God, there is effort and hard work required of us. The key is getting to know Jesus better and better. As we do his divine power is released in us and a life of moral excellence results.

Jesus knew what that would take. In Luke 11:36 he says, "If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a flood light were filling you with light."

The flood light is Jesus and we reflect his light. Jesus is the light of the world. His truth brings light into our lives. The more of his Word dwells in us, the more light there will be in us. When sufficient light is in the room, there will be no dark corners. Sufficient intake of His word in our daily lives and we will be able to see clearly the truth about every thought, action and attitude. Once we see the truth clearly, why and how to rid our lives of darkness will be obvious.

Most of us have dark corners, areas of our lives we wish didn't exist and sins we want no one to see. God's light, when it truly

fills our lives, enables us to see, identify and eliminate the darkness. And when we do, when our lives are filled with his light and no dark corners remain, then our whole lives become radiant; our conversations, our relationships, our actions, our thoughts. It will be as though our lives had become a brilliant flood light, giving off light to everything and everyone around us with every increasing intensity.

We must follow fully, reflect authentically, and

3RD SHARE GENEROUSLY – this is our outward focus, sharing Christ generously at every opportunity.

I heard many years that witnessing, evangelism or sharing Christ was like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. The more I thought about that, the less I liked the analogy.

I think sharing Christ is closer to a rich man telling a poor man where to find the wealth; and we should do this generously. True disciples have found such riches in Christ, we can't help but want to share them.

And unique to these riches, the more you give away, the more you have. The Apostle Paul in his last visit with the church at Ephesus tells them, "My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God." Acts 20:24

This is Paul's farewell address to the leaders of the church at Ephesus. He knows he will probably never see them again and so these are his final instructions to them.

Life is worth nothing unless we are faithful to do the work Jesus has assigned to us, the work of sharing the Good News of God's wonderful kindness and love.

In our membership class last Wednesday night I told the class that this church has always been



aggressive in getting the message of God's love to our community. In fact we have a number of very exciting outreach events coming up.

In June we have our annual Fryathon, an outreach to High School students.



Felicia Barton, American Idol semifinalist will be here in concert July 8th. That's something all of us can invite people to.

In August we will host the simulcast of Greg Laurie's Harvest Crusade from Anaheim Stadium.



October 31 is our annual Trunk of Treat, and outreach to children and their families, and our Christmas outreach is always one of our biggest opportunities of the year.

These are all opportunities for us to share generously. To be true disciples we must follow fully, reflect authentically, share generously and finally,

4TH DISCIPLE INTENTIONALLY - this is our future focus; to disciple others intentionally.

As you trace the growth of the first century church you discover an interesting thing. Acts 6:7 records, "Then the word of the Lord spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem."

Acts 2:41 tells us when Peter preached in Jerusalem at Pentecost about 3000 people were added to the church in one day. In Acts 2:45 it says the church displayed great unity and generosity and the Lord added daily to their number. Again the word "added" is used.

Seeing the apostle's miraculous signs and the young church's open worship in the temple, more and more people were added to their number (5:14).

But 6:1, however, rapid multiplication begins. This growth caused logistical problems for the Care Ministry of the church. Once a solution was found by delegating responsibilities to qualified ministry assistants, not only did the number of believers increase but the number of disciples multiplied (6:7).

Ultimately, addition must accelerate to multiplication if we are going to get the job done. We cannot be content with just adding new believer, but we must multiply disciples. Jesus sends us out to do the same work that the Father sent him to do. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." John 20:21

We must make disciples who will go and make more disciples who will disciple others. Exponential growth is required to fulfill Christ's Great Commission.

Now we have already experienced some hesitancy when people see our discipleship covenant. The final commitment is to

1. Give serious consideration to continuing the discipling chain by committing myself to invest in at least two other people for the year following the initial completion of *Discipleship Essentials*.

Some people are thinking "I could never do that!" The secret of course, is that it won't be you doing it. Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure." (NKJV)

In fact, Jesus is very clear about our role. In Matthew 23:8 he says, "don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters."

That one teacher of course is Jesus. In this section of scripture he is condemning the prideful seeking of position and recognition being practiced by the Pharisees and religious leaders of his day.

Jesus recognizes authentic leadership in Lk 22:26. Paul says some will be spiritually gifted teachers in Ep 4:11. Paul even calls himself the spiritual father of the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 4:15.

The error and the point Jesus is noting is self-elevation and self-importance. But Jesus reminds us that we all have one teacher. He was the master and teacher for the disciples (Jn 13:13).

And Jesus explains that his Holy Spirit who lives in us will be our teacher (Jn 14:26) and leads us into all truth (Jn 14:17). And because we are all indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are on the same level, we can teach each other (Col. 3:16).

Paul says in Col 3:16 "Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives."

One of the great joys of quads and triads is learning from each other; enjoying the richness of the Holy Spirit speaking through others. We need to be good learners as we listen to God's voice through those he put in our lives.