



January 19th, 2025
“Discipleship: What we Do”
Mat. 28:18-20; Col. 1:28-29
Pastor Ken Stoesz

Good morning. Please open your Bibles to Matthew 28:18-20, but let me first read again from Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

“Go therefore and make disciples of every nation, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

How was it that Christianity grew from a small band of uneducated men to spread across the globe? At the time Jesus ascended to heaven there were just over 100 disciples; 20 years later the surrounding nations around Israel had churches in them. 300 years later, it was overwhelming the most powerful nation on earth. Now, it is penetrating the darkest corners of the nations. How? The short answer is that God does this great work across every tribe, tongue, nation—young and old, men and women—but how He does it is where you and I come in.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Disciples are made by God through His people. He uses people to spread His word. You hear it in the Deuteronomy—talk about this message to those closest to you and beyond. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples teaching them to obey everything I commanded!” Last week we saw that Worship is what we are made for. This morning: Discipleship is what we do. This is a huge topic and today is part I.

So, what is a disciple? Let’s look at 5 elements of a disciple and I’ll close with a warning.

First is Obedience.

“If you love me, show it by doing what I told you...” or... “If you love me you will keep my commandments...” Luke 6:46 **“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord, ’and not do what I tell you?”** (John 14:15)

We are all obeying different things. We obey traffic laws, we obey teachers or parents. Obedience implies authority over you. Why do younger siblings struggle to obey their

older siblings? Because they have no authority over them— ‘you’re not the boss of me!’ Whereas a disciple of Jesus recognizes first off that Jesus has a claim on your life. He is not a nice addition, something you think about once a week...rather, His teachings/commands are the blueprint for how you are to live your life. Your job as a disciple is to ‘obey’ them.

This is not a one-time aspect, but an ongoing reality for a disciple—obedience. Jesus said that we are to ‘teach them to obey everything I have commanded you’...so the calling is for your whole life. A mark of a Christian is someone who is striving towards consistent, joyful obedience to Jesus Christ.

But here’s the thing about obedience (and all these marks) ...they are not easy. People will pay hundreds of dollars for ‘obedience training’...training what? Dogs. Why? Because dogs need to be trained to obey what the ‘master’ wants them to do. Obedience is not natural...it is work. The word ‘die’ is in obedience. People balk at the word obey because it says there is an authority over you and you submit to it.

So how are you doing with this? In Ezekiel 33:30-32, he laments because the people love hearing about God and the stories of redemption...yet they remained unchanged, untouched and disobedient. **“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 practice.”** It was because of disobedience that Jerusalem was destroyed. This is an ongoing problem in Scripture for the people of God and it is a problem today.

So how are you doing with this? Do you know what Jesus expects of you (do you know His commands? If not, start reading the gospels.) Are you forgiving others, are you praying, are you more loving and generous to others, do you seek after God’s kingdom more than the kingdom of this world? Are you obeying Jesus’ commands?

Secondly, Repentance is a sign of a disciple. The reality is, you and I cannot obey everything Jesus taught all the time. Sin is real and part of our reality. **“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”** (Luke 5:32)

Okay, so what does that word ‘repent’ mean? It is a “changing of one’s mind in regards to one’s behaviour.” (RC Sproul.) Not just the changing of ideas, but convictions that shape how we live and choices we make. You could describe it as ‘going one way and then realizing you are going the wrong direction, turning around and going in the right direction.’ Yes, Christians sin, but they repent of their sins...that is the difference. There is no brazen declaration of self will and self-independence. No, there is humble repentance and confident restoration. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of all our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John 1:9) We are confident in our reconciling to God because of Jesus.

Usually associated with this are feelings of remorse, grief and regret. ‘I wish I had not done that...or said that’—those are signs of repentance. **“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my**

transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight..." (Psalm 51:1-4)

There are no excuses, no denying or justifying...there is regret and confession. A Christian knows that when they sin, they sin against God first and foremost. A non-Christian does not believe that; there is no regret or remorse leading to change.

Remember, this is king David at the peak of his power, his influence and strength, not teenager David...no, this is a guy who knows better. So, repentance is not a thing for new Christians but is a mark of ALL Christians. It is a sign of God 'chiseling' away at your life making you into His image. Repentance is not just for young Christians, but for all of us at all times—it is a doorway out of habitual sin and freedom from shame/guilt.

Thirdly, a mark of a disciple is one who Learns from Jesus. Jesus says to the disciples 'Follow me...*teaching* them to obey everything I command.' A disciple is one who is learning to follow Jesus. Studying His words, observing his life and anticipating His return.

'Come to me those who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'
(Matthew 11:28-29)

A disciple is learning, but this learning is combined with obedience and submission—taking his yoke (big piece of wood that sat on the shoulders of cattle so they could pull at farming equipment to till the ground or pull heavy loads.) Learning from Jesus means there is work to be done, but (note this!) the work Jesus gives the disciples is easy work. It is much easier than sin. **"We can decide to live in response to the abundance of God and not under the dictatorship of our own poor needs."**

— Eugene H. Peterson

Sin enslaves, addicts, separates you from all relationships, replaces peace with shame, joy with resentment, hope with agitation. Learn from Jesus. Paul said, 'I count everything a loss except knowing Christ Jesus.' Do you know Him? Are you learning from Him? That is a mark of a disciple.

Fourth is perseverance. A disciple is one who follows, obeys, repents, learns and perseveres in following Jesus. **Matthew 10:22 "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."** **James 1:12 "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."** **Hebrews 10:36 "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised."** Endurance/perseverance characterize the long road for the disciple of Jesus Christ. A long obedience in the same direction.

An aspect of persevering is waiting on God. Consider **Psalm 40:1-3: "I waited patiently for the Lord..."** How many of us have lost our way because we did not and

cannot wait patiently for the Lord? It is a mark of a disciple who can persevere and who can wait. 'Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength'.

“There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.”
— Eugene H. Peterson

Holiness, like an oak tree, does not grow overnight. but over a 'long obedience in the same direction.' Endurance is mark of a disciple. It learns from Jesus that said, 'In this world you will have trouble...take heart I have overcome the world.'

Life is hard. God's Spirit enables you to obey, to repent, to learn and to endure. One luxury EMBC has are our seniors who have endured, many have lost loved ones, come from war torn countries, experienced poverty and obscurity...yet are here worshiping God. Disciples persevere, not in their strength but have learnt to do so in His strength. 'Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength.'

Warnings:

- 1. Solo road in discipleship.** **“But encourage one another daily as long as it is called Today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.”** (Hebrews 3:13) Do not stop meeting with one another. A disciple is one who gathers in groups; the Holy Spirit draws each of us together for times of edification and support. Cicero: **“The soul that is sick cannot heal itself except by following the instruction of others who are wise.”** Warning is to not isolate from other Christians. Seek others out who are seeking the Lord...and grow!
- 2. You can drift.** **“Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”** (1 Tim.6:16.) Imagine what happens when you untether a canoe from a dock, it drifts.
- 3. Discipleship will change you.** Jesus said, **‘Take up your cross and follow Me!’** Choosing to obey Jesus, to learn from Him. Studying His words and repenting are 'taking up the cross' personally, but it affects other areas: **“Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, receiving the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting those in prison.”** (Matthew 25) Jesus said, 'You did not do this to me!' Discipleship involves denying yourself of money, time, convenience. In a church this size you have enormous opportunities to take up your cross and serve others. In this city—broken as it is by sin—you and I have enormous opportunities to take up our cross and serve others.
- 4. You can be lost...and not know it.** Matthew 7—Jesus says, 'Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven.' They did great things but Jesus says, 'I do not know you'. This is not a new problem, **“These people worship me with their mouths, but their hearts are far from me.”** (Isaiah 29:13) You can look great on the outside and yet your heart can be far from Him.

So, discipleship is far more than doing a bunch of things and telling people about Jesus; it is primarily knowing Him, loving Him. The way we display our love for Him is by obeying Him, repenting when we sin, learning from him and not giving up.

One last thing about being a disciple of Jesus. Remember, it was Peter who denied Jesus at His time of need (Matthew 26:69-74), but Jesus reinstated him (John 21:15-18). A disciple is not a perfect person, not chosen because they do everything right—no, they are those who know they need Jesus and go back to Him for mercy, grace and strength.

God ultimately is the one making disciples, even now. His Holy Spirit is drawing people to Jesus, convicting of sin, comforting in affliction and teaching them to obey Him. We go and do this because God does this. Discipleship is 'supernatural work' which none of us are capable of—but **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”** (1 Peter 2:9)

We are a people that cry out, 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and renew a right spirit within me.' A spirit that is at rest and at peace with God. A soul that rests knowing Jesus which is greater than anything in this life. And Jesus says, 'You are to go and tell others about Me.'

Next week we will look at Part II—discipleship reaching those who do not know Jesus. **“Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.”** (Matthew 4:19)