

MONDAY, 5/1

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

In light of Dr. Dave Smith and the *True North* weekend, this week we will be pausing our study of 2 Timothy so that we can focus on discipleship. Consider this a “best of discipleship” mix of passages. As a church whose mission is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” we cannot allow the call and vision for discipleship to falter.

By now, it is evident that we got our mission statement from today's passage. This is known as the Great Commission. It is Jesus' charge to His followers to carry on the mission He began.

The Great Commission comes after Jesus' resurrection and just before He ascends to be with His Father. These are the final words of Jesus' earthly ministry. They are vital to the mission of Jesus' church. They are also for all of Jesus' followers to live out. The crowd who remained with Jesus here was made up of apostles and everyday people who were eager to follow Him. Jesus gives this call to all of them, and that includes us, His followers today.

The Great Commission of helping raise up people who know and follow Jesus is the overarching mission of our lives. We inherit this mission when we become a part of God's Kingdom through putting our hope in what Jesus has done for us. This work is essentially our beginning to share with others the work Jesus is now doing in us through the Holy Spirit.

This is about living a life of purpose--better yet, it is using our lives to live out Jesus' purpose. What a glorious privilege it is for Jesus to invite us into the eternal work that He started! It is refreshing to consider being a part of a bigger narrative than merely serving our own personal wants and wishes.

That being said, most Christians feel overwhelmed and under-equipped for the call to help make disciples. Perhaps, that resonates with you. Without diminishing the call, I want to encourage you. You do not do this work in isolation. In verse 20, Jesus promises to be with us. Our efforts are backed by the power of our Savior and the Holy Spirit. God is able to do what is impossible for us. We do not have the adequate resources in and of ourselves to make someone into a disciple. That is first and foremost a work of the Spirit. We are called simply to be faithful servants who work in conjunction with what the Lord is doing.

So, what does discipleship look like on our end? We will flesh this out a little more this week, but look at what Jesus says. It is moving through your life with the purpose of helping make disciples. We are to help others to a life with God, into a rich relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That means praying for and with them. It means poring over the teachings of Jesus together, seeking to obey Him in all things. That is your primary responsibility. The results of your efforts belong to the Lord. You are simply called to be faithful.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, I consider it an awesome privilege to be called to share in Your mission. Where I feel overwhelmed, comfort me. Show me what I can begin doing today with those in my life. Help me to dive deeper into my life with You and share my journey with them. May my efforts be empowered by Your grace. I cannot do this without You, and I know You wouldn't send me out without Your presence and power. Amen.

TUESDAY, 5/2

Read Acts 2:42-47.

Before we move into what discipleship looks like in our personal lives, let's take a look at what a discipleship culture in the church looks like.

This glimpse into the life of the early church takes place on the heels of Pentecost. After the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the people, the Lord drew thousands of people to Himself through Peter's preaching. From this, the church began to gather together.

This passage helps us see what made up the early church's life together. The first word I observed is that they *devoted* themselves. They dedicated and invested themselves in the life of the church. They sought the Lord through the apostles' teachings, with our equivalent today being the Word. They enjoyed being together in fellowship because they knew the Lord's presence was manifested in their togetherness. They broke bread together, which means more than just eating. They remembered Jesus' sacrifice. It was the central story to their life, and it informed how they loved one another. They prayed together. They pursued Jesus' will and supported one another through prayer. These are the life-giving practices of the church with a rich discipleship culture.

Look what this life together produced in the people. They held everything in common. They had a similar mind because it was fixed on the Lord rather than their individual wills. They prioritized Jesus above all. They also loved one another deeply. They liked one another, which sounds so simple, but we know this can be more complicated in community at times. Since they loved one another, they made sacrifices for one another. Their generosity wasn't forced. It was pure and organic, an expression of genuine love for the Lord and one another.

All of this produced continual praise of God, likely both spontaneous and organized. It also led people to want to belong to this community. Notice that it was the life of the church that drew people to the church. Life abounded in this group called the church in such a way that people couldn't wait to experience it for themselves. I wonder if people would say the same of us.

This is a compelling vision for the culture of discipleship we want to develop in our church. My goal here is to hold this vision up against our church. Do you see places where we are living this out? Are there places where we can grow? My answers are yes and yes. I'm grateful for the discipleship culture Jesus has built in our church. I also see that we need His help to realize this vision.

I do believe wholeheartedly that we are moving toward this vision and that we can take big strides toward it if we are each willing to devote ourselves to Christ. A culture is made up of the sum of its parts. If each one of us commits to devoting ourselves to Jesus and His mission through the church, we will see more and more of this vision come to life in our church.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we pray that under Your leadership as our Good Shepherd and the Head of us, Your church, You would help us realize this vision in our church. We want our life together to be a reflection of what You want the church to be. Help us as we seek to reach new people for Christ. Lead people from our community to us. Let us go out and extend fellowship to them. Help us immerse others into a life with You. Embody our praises and let Your Spirit have all of us. We want to abound in Your love and grace. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 5/3

Read Ephesians 4:11-16.

Following Peter's great confession that Jesus is the "Messiah, the Son of the Living God," Jesus promises to build His church. This work first belongs to Him. Yes, we have a role to play, but Jesus is the power that fuels the church.

In these verses, Paul fleshes out the role of the church in making disciples. Verse 11 tells us that in an effort to build His church, Jesus distributed gifts to those who make up the church. Some were to be leaders and others were to be teachers or pastors. These various gifts and callings were given for the good of the church as a whole.

The purpose of these gifts is to "equip God's people for works of service." The church is an equipping agent. The resources of the church are to prepare people to serve in Jesus' mission. It is to help you live into God's calling on your life. That calling might entail serving the needs of others as a care minister. It might be seeking to reach others through outreach or teaching a Sunday school class or small group. You have a calling. Now, the church is to help train you to step into it, but you also have to step into it. I hope you know and are experiencing the joy of serving Jesus. If you don't, begin praying for God to reveal it to you. Schedule a time to sit down with the pastors. We would love to help.

Paul then tells us the end goal of our works of service for the church. It is to build up the Body of Christ until "we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." This is quite a vision. Our service to Jesus will result in the church flourishing as a vibrant, healthy community. It will look like God's Kingdom. New people will be reached with the gospel because the evangelists and missionaries (both near and far) are out sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. People will grow as disciples in the church as teachers and pastors do their work. We will all be on the journey of moving toward likeness to Jesus.

In verses 14-16, Paul says that this journey toward Christlikeness is marked by maturity and is empowered by His love. Our growth in Christ anchors us as we are subjected to the storms of culture and life. We are less likely to be duped into following ways that do not lead us into greater life with Christ. Instead, we will speak and act in true love for the other, just as Jesus loved us.

This is another compelling look into what a discipleship culture within the church can produce. Let us continue to pray for Jesus to build our life together so that we are strengthened in Him and more deeply committed to His work.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, we need Your help. We want to live into this vision for our church. We need Your guidance, wisdom, and power. We need You to speak loudly to each person in our community. Reveal to them the gifts You have given so that the church can be built up. Call to those who are gifted in witnessing to the Good News so that those who do not yet know Jesus will receive the invitation to new life in Him. We want those in our church community to become mature in Christ and grow in His love. Amen."

THURSDAY, 5/4

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9.

Today we're going to shift to what discipleship looks like in our personal lives. If we are indeed called to growth as disciples and to help others grow as disciples, then we need a model for what that can look like. Fortunately, Deuteronomy 6 gives us such a model.

The context behind this passage is the instruction Moses receives from the Lord on Mount Horeb. He is preparing to share those instructions with the people. Chapters 6-11 focus on the necessity of obedience to God's commands. These verses in chapter 6 will give you a taste of what follows in Deuteronomy as God's people prepare to enter the Promised Land.

I want to channel our energy into verses 4-9. Verse 5 will sound familiar to you as it is the verse Jesus references when He was asked about the greatest commandment. Chapter 6 tells us that we can love God with our entire being only when we obey Him. Obedience is God's love language. Our words will mean very little unless they are backed up with our actions.

Verses 6-9 give instruction on how to share these commands with our children. I think this easily applies to anyone in your sphere of influence. The gist of the verses is to immerse your life in God's Word. It isn't just to give God five minutes a day and then go on about your life. The instruction is to talk about what you are learning or reading with others. Let it be a part of your daily discussion. Bring it up at the dinner table or driving to the next thing. It is reasonable to add praying with those in your life to start the day and/or end it. Look, life is busy, but we can still make room for these practices as we go about our day.

What is noteworthy here is that Moses mentions nothing about teaching. It's fair to imply that, but he mostly just talks about sprinkling your conversation with God's Word. This is an intentional practice. If we haven't done this, then we will need to build this discipline into our lives. Fortunately, it will become just a part of what we do at some point, which will be more organic.

I wonder how you can begin to work what you are studying and learning about God's Word into your daily conversations with the people in your life. How can you begin to pray with them?

Praying Together:

"God, I am grateful for these instructions about how to invest in and share my journey of growth in grace with others. I need Your guidance so that I can bless others in this way. I want to be a vessel through which You encourage others. Show me what I can do today to take a step in this direction. Amen."

FRIDAY, 5/5

Read Acts 8:26-40.

At this point in Acts, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on the church at Pentecost. As the church grew in Jerusalem, it began to feel the pressure of persecution. The threats scattered the church in all directions, which worked to spread the Good News of Jesus. Our passage today illustrates how the gospel began making its way throughout the world.

Philip, one of the apostles, began sharing the gospel around Samaria. With the prompting of the Spirit, Philip travels down an important market road. There he encounters an Ethiopian eunuch who was a part of the king's court. He was reading from Isaiah, but he was unable to put it all together. Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading. The eunuch replies, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?"

The source of confusion was that Isaiah presents the problem of God's wayward people who are unable to embrace their God. It highlights this problem, but it does not provide the answer. It points to the answer as One whom God would send to the people as a Messiah to redeem the people, and through this One, He would enable them to finally be God's people. Isaiah introduces the longing for God to send this One, but He is not sent in the book. He is only hoped for.

Philip knew that the One that Isaiah foresaw was none other than Jesus. It is Jesus' life and person that make Isaiah come together. Without the picture of Jesus, the story is incomplete. He brings clarity to the story and hope for newness of life to God's people. Philip understood this because, by God's grace, he was invited to experience Jesus. This put him in a place to share and make sense of what was an incomplete story for the Ethiopian eunuch.

This is one picture of what discipleship looks like in our lives. While discipleship isn't only our imparting wisdom to someone who lacks understanding, that is a part of it. It is as we grow in our understanding that we have something to impart to others.

I realize that this is one of the more intimidating aspects of discipleship. Many Christians don't feel comfortable or worthy to explain the Word to others, but as this story helps us see, someone has to explain it. How else will people understand?

This indeed puts some pressure on us to engage with the scriptures in seeking greater understanding. We cannot explain that which we do not understand ourselves. You should be motivated to know more of God for yourself, but also so that you have some insight to share with those who are growing. This does not, and should not, be done in arrogance or a sense of superiority. Discipleship is a work of grace. We are not the primary disciple-maker. That belongs to the Lord. We are just servants whom He invites to share in the work.

So, consider how you are seeking to grow as a disciple. Are you investing in your life with God in such a way that you have something to share? Let me share some good news with you: if you're reading this, then you're doing something. The more you grow through personal and communal study, public worship and prayer, the more you will have to share.

Praying Together:

"Lord, I'm a little intimidated by the call to help explain Your Word. Remind me that I do not do this work alone. You are my help. Help me make use of the various resources in my life to help me learn. Remind me that I don't have to have all the answers in order to have something to share. The burden to make disciples is not mine to bear. I am to be a faithful servant, a resource. You are the power. Amen."

SATURDAY, 5/6

Read Matthew 13:18-23.

This is one of Jesus' most well-known parables. It is essentially about the condition of our hearts.

We know that God is always speaking and revealing Himself to us and to the world. Jesus is still reaching out and seeking to draw people unto Himself. The question is not with God's faithfulness, but about the condition of our hearts when He speaks.

In this parable, Jesus illustrates the various conditions of the human heart when God's words fall upon it. Sometimes God's wisdom meets a heart that is like the hard soil. Perhaps, it has been wounded and built-up scar tissue to protect it from further harm. Whatever the reason, the hardness of this heart keeps the good from getting in along with the bad. Before it can take root, the enemy snatches it up.

Then there is the rocky soil. As residents of Midlothian, we know a thing or two about this kind of soil. Much of Israel has a few inches of dirt followed by a layer of rock. The person whose heart reflects this soil quickly receives the seed, but has little room for the seed to produce fruit.

Perhaps, he hears God's Word on Sunday morning and is filled with new excitement. However, without practices that sustain the soul, the seed begins to die out.

If we're honest with ourselves, we've all been each of these soils at one point or another. Sometimes we bounce from one to the other. I use this parable to help us understand the importance of watching the condition of our hearts. There is a reason why the book of Proverbs calls on us to guard our hearts. They are key to us experiencing vitality in our life with Jesus.

Take the good soil, for instance. It is in such a condition that it is able to receive the seed and give it room to flourish. As a result, the seed takes root and bears much fruit. This is a great vision for our lives. We will want to build practices and time with the Lord so that there is room to swallow up His instruction. With this space, it will bear fruit in our lives. This is the vision of a soul that is well and able to thrive in Christ.

If you found that vision of the good soil compelling and yet far from where you are, let me leave you with some encouragement. No matter which soil you are today, you can become good soil. If you have a hard heart, ask God to graciously break it up and restore it. If you're the shallow, rocky soil, invite the Lord to move in your heart and make room in your life for greater depth. If you're plagued by weeds and worries, ask God to speak into your life and clear everything that doesn't give you life. God has the power to take any condition of our heart and make it whole again. Call on Him, and He will bring restoration. Let's be sure to cooperate with Him by adopting practices that sustain our health and growth in His grace.

Praying Together:

"Father, You are so faithful. You know the condition of my heart. I need You to speak, to plant Your word in my heart. I want to know You. If there is anything that is getting in the way of Your word bearing fruit, remove it or break it up. I want Your life to be poured out into my own. Amen."

SUNDAY, 5/7

Read James 1:22-25.

I love the book of James. He doesn't mince many words.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves," he said. If we want to grow as followers of Jesus, we must do more than merely hear His words. We are called to listen to His words and internalize them. We are to wrestle with them until they begin to shape our hearts and minds to the point that they influence our actions.

Jesus' words are meant to transform us. We call this grace sanctification. It is our growth in likeness to Jesus. The idea is that as we walk with Him, we grow in love and faithfulness. Slowly but surely, we begin to think like Jesus and thus act like Him. Sanctification is a long game. It doesn't not happen overnight.

If we want to be on this path of growing in likeness to Jesus, then we must move with intention into His teachings with the desire to allow them to shape us. We aim to do the teachings of Jesus.

This is for good reason. As James makes evident in the verses that follow, our new identity is in Jesus. By His grace, we are His. We have chosen to attach ourselves to Him, which has the accompanying desire to be like Him. We know Him to be so good, and we want to be a reflection of His goodness in the world.

So to make good on this desire, we must “look intently” into His words. We must pore over them and consider what they mean for our lives. We spend time observing the things that He said to us. We seek to faithfully interpret what they mean to us and specifically to our lives. Then, with His help, we seek to live them out in our daily lives. This is when we experience the freedom and blessing of which James speaks.

I wonder how your practices of studying Jesus' words are enabling you to be a doer of His word.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, help me to be a doer of Your word, not just a listener. I want Your teachings to shape my heart and my mind. I want to live into the fullness and freedom that is mine when I live in obedience to You. You have shown me how to live free. Help me to trust You completely and embrace Your vision for my life. Amen.”