

I. Introduction

- A. Happy New Year. Let's hope and pray and strive and trust God for a great 2011 for His glory.
- B. I'm starting this year with a theme. We're talking about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. What does a disciple do? How do you become a good one?
- C. I'm going to preach on being a disciple this month, but actually, discipleship will be our theme for the whole year. We're going to make 2011 the year of living disciplined-ly.
- D. And I want to say that we're going to learn and grow together. Our leadership team is going to spend a lot of time this season, getting crystal clear on who we are and how we make disciples. We understand the big picture and the broad ideas. But how we approach things, and how we phrase things, is something that we'll be hashing out. How does Neighborhood Church make more disciples, and how does Neighborhood Church make better disciples?
- E. We want to hear your voice. We want your input. So don't hesitate to let us know what works, and what doesn't work for you. Because it really is our vision to become a world-class disciple making center.
- F. To do that we need a really clear pathway—clear stepping stones for discipleship. We're not so good at that yet, but it's something we're working hard to create. And like I said, we'd love to hear your voice on that.
- G. What I want to do today is lay out the core concept. What is the heart of being a disciple? What does the Bible say about what is most important about making disciples?
- H. Think with me through four key truths of discipleship. And we're going to be in different places in the Bible to glean these truths.

II. Four Truths about Discipleship

A. The Prerequisite for Discipleship

1. You have to be saved first. You have to receive Jesus first. You have to be born again first. I don't care how you term it, but I do care about the truth.
2. And truth is that there is an order to your life with God.
3. First, salvation: that is the work of God through Christ by the Spirit that brings you into the family of God and so many of you over these last months and weeks have taken that first step of Salvation.
4. And that gets followed with—here's a big word—Sanctification. That is the work of God in making you more and more like Jesus: more loving, more righteous, more non-dysfunctional, more holy.
 - a) *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10, NKJV).*
5. If life with God is like a beautiful mansion, then salvation is like **CROSSING THE THRESHHOLD**, and sanctification is like **OCCUPYING THE MANSION**.
6. Now, that's all setup for this formula: Salvation + Sanctification --> Discipleship. And it always has to go in that order.
7. Because I'm going to talk about our duties and obligations as followers of Jesus, but you have to know that those duties and obligations are totally impossible unless you're saved first. Are you saved? Have you embraced Jesus? You can embrace Jesus today or more accurately, you can stop running and let Him grab hold of you today.

B. The Goal of Discipleship

1. *12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14, NKJV).*
2. I love this verse. When I was a young Christian, I wrestled hard trying to understand what it meant. And then it dawned on me, and it changed me. It actually healed me of a false impression.
3. I've told you before about growing up in a wonderful, caring, warm church that also had a big streak of legalism running through it.
4. One of the legalistic strains that got pumped into my bloodstream defined discipleship in a certain way. I always thought that being a good follower of Jesus meant giving up stuff: Giving up my rights, giving up my possessions, giving up my time, giving up my comforts and pleasures.
5. So I always resisted God because I knew that He wanted me to give up stuff. And there is a place for that in our lives as disciples. God certainly does call us to let go, give up and surrender our lives for His sake.
6. But I'd like to say that is absolutely impossible, and it always comes across as legalistic, unless you set the giving up part of discipleship in a bigger context. And this verse provides that context.
7. What is it?

8. Well, this verse was written by a disciple named Paul. He was not reared as a follower of Jesus. In fact, Paul hated Jesus and hated Christians. He persecuted the early church, and only later, as an adult, came to faith in Jesus.
 9. It's important, because some of us in this room today were reared in the church, but a lot of us were not. Many found Jesus as children; while a whole bunch found Jesus as adults.
 10. For the purposes of being a good disciple, it really doesn't make a difference.
 11. Because the big truth that jumps out from this passage is wrapped up in the second part of verse 12.
 - a) I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.
 12. What's he saying?
 13. He's saying that on the day God saved you, He had something in mind for you. God has a vision for your life. It is a vision for a full, abundant, purpose-filled, blessed, meaningful, satisfied, overcoming, victorious-though-wounded life.
 14. God has a dream for the person you could be. God has a dream for the life you could live.
 15. And that dream is excitedly abundantly more than you could ever ask or think. That doesn't mean it is easy. That doesn't mean it is trouble-free.
 16. What it means is that when God brings you through the struggles and losses and confusions—when He brings you through the wilderness, there remains for you a life more wonderful than words can describe.
 17. Jesus paid dearly for this life for you. He purchased it on Calvary's cross. He shed blood and died to make this life available to you. Your potential life is that valuable. It is priceless.
 18. This LIFE is what God had in mind for you on the day you were saved. This life is why He saved you. This life is why He laid hold of you.
 19. And now, your quest is clear: your quest is to lay hold of the life. Your quest is to lay hold of that for which also Christ Jesus has laid hold of you.
 20. Your goal, your end zone, is that you would seize the life. Seize the full life, the blessed life, the exciting life, the adventurous life of trying to keep up with the One Man who fully lived.
 21. When I finally understood that goal, as a 20-something Christ-follower, it lit up in my heart like fireworks.
 22. I had always defined my quest as what I had to give up.
 23. But this verse told me differently. This verse told me that my quest was first and foremost, to lay hold of something. That was revolutionary for me. It was part of my journey out of legalism.
 24. How many of you know that it's easier to let go if you have something better to lay hold of?
 25. Discipleship is the life-long quest of your true life.
 26. Between you and the true life stands the RESISTANCE: Demons, Satan, and the world system, evil. Yeah, it's all arrayed against you to keep you from true life.
 27. But the bigger resistance is within you.
 28. That's why Paul says, I PRESS ON. Slay the dragon of your own complacency. Breach the walls of your own self-centeredness. Stare down the monster of your own laziness. Whatever it takes—press on to lay hold of the life God had in mind for you on the day He saved.
 29. I feel sorry for people who abandon their discipleship quest. You can never be fully alive. You can only be half alive.
 30. That is the goal of the true disciple of Jesus. Can you imagine a community of friends standing shoulder to shoulder in that quest? Can you imagine brothers and sisters, fighting together, helping each other, warning each other, encouraging one another, training and equipping each other for this quest?
 31. That's what we want to be. That's what we want Neighborhood church to be. Thousands of people finding life in Christ—full life, true life, real life—the life you were meant to live. That's the goal.
- c. The Power of Discipleship
1. Jesus lays out the power for discipleship in John 15. Let's take it one verse at a time.
 2. *1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:1-3, NKJV).*
 - a) So Jesus sets up this metaphor, and it's about being a disciple. He's the vine, we're the branches.
 - b) And the first thing He points out is that when a vinedresser (a grape farmer) sees that a branch isn't bearing fruit, He prunes it.
 - c) And so, God will prune the parts of your life that don't bear fruit. Another way to look at it is this: all the parts of your life that result in more death than life, God will cut them off.
 - d) He will take the fun out of it. He will stop subsidizing it. Whatever you do that robs your joy, and deadens your spirit, God prunes. And He does that because He loves you. He does

that—He prunes the dead wood—not to take from you, but to enable you to lay hold of the life you were meant to live.

3. *4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5, NKJV).*
 - a) Here is the secret power of discipleship.
 - b) It is not your striving. It is not your surrender. It is not your sweat that is the secret.
 - c) It is Christ’s life flowing through you, just like the life of a vine flows through the branches.
 - d) This is a big mystery, but it’s the core of our faith. Christ lives in you, and Christ lives through you. And your first job is to abide in Christ.
 - e) When you abide in Christ, what happens? Fruit happens.
 - f) Apart from abiding in Christ, what can you do? Nothing.
 - g) So, as much as we can teach the habits of prayer, and Scripture, and community, and service—and we will, because each of these habits is a non-negotiable if you’re going to be a good disciple.
 - h) Even still, I feel like I have to remind you over and over and over and over—**NO METHODS WORK IF YOU’RE NOT ABIDING IN CHRIST.**
 - i) So what does that mean? What does it mean to abide in Christ? The word for abide, here, just means to remain, to stick close, to hang out.
 - j) I read an author from Australia, and he described the huge ranches they have down under. He pointed out that they don’t build fences, partly because the ranches are just too big, and partly because they don’t have to.
 - k) The reason is because the outback is pretty much a desert—here and there are springs, and little pools of fresh water.
 - l) Fences trap you.
 - m) But pools draw you. Pools of fresh water attract you.
 - n) To abide in Christ means to hang out close to Christ—to stick close to Christ, emotionally, habitually and prayerfully. When you’re dry, you automatically turn to Christ first. He’s your source, and He’s your power.
 - o) Legalism builds fences and issues commands: don’t mess with my rules.
 - p) Jesus built a pool and offered invitations: Come and be refreshed.
 - q) Discipleship is a duty, but like all our duties, if you don’t find your life and power in Jesus, it’s going to be a miserable, legalistic duty, and you’re going to resent it.
4. Because the goal is the life you were meant to live.
5. And the power can only be the mystery of Christ Himself, living in you and through you.
- D. The Effect of Discipleship
 1. Or you could really title this section: why bother? Why should you take the arduous path called discipleship? Why not just come to church once a week, put a few dollars into the offering plate, and call it good?
 2. The answer is because as a devoted disciple of Jesus you will have your life change in three profound ways. Here they are.
 3. The first effect of discipleship is **MATURITY.**
 - a) *11 He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ, 13 until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth (Ephesians 4:11-14, NLT).*
 4. Please don’t stay in spiritual kindergarten forever. The term I use for this is **P.S.I. (PROTRACTED SPIRITUAL INFANCY).**
 5. Maturity brings you past your addictions and dysfunctions, so you find your identity in Christ.
 6. Maturity makes you rise above your self-centered Inner Brat, so you can accept what life hands you with dignity and poise.
 7. Maturity makes you steady in relationships and fruitful in ministry and mission.
 8. When you are mature, your choices are wise.
 9. When you are mature, you are in a position to really help the people around you.

10. As your pastor, I am begging you, urging you, with all the love and yet with all the needed rebuke I can muster, dear follower of Jesus Christ, it is time to Grow Up!
11. Maturity is the first effect of discipleship.
12. The second effect is INTEGRITY.
13. By that, I mean you reflect the character of Christ.
 - a) *22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22, 23, NKJV).*
14. This is the character of Christ. The way you develop this character is NOT by making a list, and working on each one, one at a time. No. True character is a by-product of growth and discipleship.
15. Do you know what turns people off to Jesus? When people who follow Jesus operate without integrity, without honesty, without joy and self-control, and when our character doesn't match Christ's character, the onlooking world has a right to point out our hypocrisy.
16. And I know we're all somewhere on a spectrum. Nobody has arrived. We all have a journey to go. Just make sure that you are heading the right direction more and more each day.
17. And I know that's painful, because I'm preaching to myself. God wants holy people—whole, pure, clean. And discipleship is how He gets us there.
18. So there's maturity and integrity. And I'll just point out...
19. The third effect of discipleship is CHARITY.
20. True, self-giving love—love for God, which we call worship. Love for the people of God, which we call community. And love for the world for whom Christ died, which we call outreach.
21. Your love life is a direct manifestation of your discipleship maturity.
 - a) *12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection [maturity] (Colossians 3:12-14, NKJV).*
22. Above all these things put on love. Love is the last quality we really get good at.
23. God has put people in your life to bring about deep healing—to bear your burdens, to mirror your imperfections. He's peeling away all the barnacles that crust over your Christ-like love.
24. If you care about love, if you care about integrity, and if you care about maturity—then that's why you should bother with discipleship.

III. Decision Time

- A. Have you ever started a new job, or a new school, and everything is confusing? You can't find your way around the office. You don't know what key opens what door. You're not sure how to use the tools. Everything feels awkward and weird.
- B. That's how discipleship feels. When you first start this journey, it's just plain weird. And everything seems so hard.
- C. But I promise you, there will come a time when Jesus stuff is just second nature. Where you think this way, speak this way, and act this way because you ARE this way. That is what discipleship does for you.
- D. I want to call for a decision today. It's the New Year. It's the time we form resolutions.
- E. I don't want to lay a whole bunch of them on you.
- F. Just one.
- G. Will you commit yourself to one thing? Here it is:
 1. Forward progress on the path of discipleship.
- H. Will you tell that to God? Will you make that your choice?
- I. Forward progress on the path of discipleship. Over the coming weeks, and months, and years, we will build into your life the factors to make that happen.
- J. But we can't choose for you.
- K. A lot of public places these days use special light switches. When you turn them on, the light stays on for five minutes, and then automatically switches off. You have to turn the switch back on again to get the light to come back on.
- L. Same thing with discipleship.
- M. You can turn the switch on today, but within a few days, it turns itself off again. That's just how we are.
- N. So my invitation to you is simple—Turn it on.
- O. Keep it turned on.
- P. Make forward progress.
- Q. Dear followers of Jesus—please grow up.