

Discipleship 101: What Is A Disciple?

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[0 : 00] Father God, we come before you this morning with reverence and humility. We recognize that you alone are God. Father, you alone were there at the beginning and you created all things.

Every wonder that we witness every day, every miracle of creation, has your fingerprints of love and creativity all over it. We also recognize, Father, that this morning we don't deserve it through anything that we've done or anything we could ever do ourselves.

But Lord, you have called us to be your children and given us the right, the joy, the blessing to call you Father. Thank you for making a way for that to be possible through the sacrifice of your son, Jesus.

Father, we recognize that every good and perfect gift comes from you. And this morning, Lord God, we also recognize that there are needs in our church family.

There are needs that are physical. There are needs that are emotional, spiritual, and financial. Lord, we recognize all of those things. And Father, we also recognize that you know what we need before we ever ask it, before we ever think it or begin to utter those words.

[1 : 21] And Lord, I know that many of those cries have been uttered this morning as people prayed on their own. Many of those needs have been reflected to you, Lord, and we recognize that you hear them, that you will respond, you will act according to your will and according to your timing.

Lord, we ask you to bring grace as we care for one another, as you've called us to do that. Lord, we ask you to bring healing and peace and comfort to those who have come with very real needs this morning.

Lord, we also recognize that we have sinned against you and against others. We recognize that we have said and done things that hurt you and hurt other people and hurt ourselves.

Father, please forgive us for those wrong actions. And we thank you that through Jesus, the forgiveness that we ask for is ours.

When we come before you and we confess what we have done. Lord, we pray for our brothers and sisters in our congregations this morning.

[2 : 31] Lord, we pray for the other churches in our community.

Lord, I ask that you bless their ministries and encourage the people who worship in your churches, wherever that is. Lord, we also pray for the other churches in our community.

May you move in and through them as well. Father God, we thank you for the opportunity to gather openly and publicly here this morning to declare your name and to worship you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Father, we love you and we thank you for the blessed assurance that you deeply love us as well. Thank you for always being there and calling us back to you.

Calling us back to the heart of worship. And calling us back to your plan for us. Father, this morning we pray all these things in the mighty name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

[3 : 42] Amen. Amen. Welcome here for this Sunday, February 13th. Gentlemen, tomorrow is Valentine's Day. You've been warned.

So a quick pastoral announcement. I am heading to Vancouver tomorrow morning. Lots of you know that. And I'll be there until late Wednesday. And I'm attending our denominational, here's a mouthful, our denominational ordination preparation workshop.

There you go. And why does everyone call it OPW? Now you know. So this workshop is intended to prepare ordination candidates. There's myself and four others.

And it's to prepare us for the formal ordination examination council. That's an even more scary combination of words. That happens in May at our annual assembly gathering, which is in Calgary

this year.

So I'm attending this workshop with four other candidates, as I mentioned. And they're from other churches in our denomination. And I've interacted with a few of them already.

[4 : 44] So we're looking forward to it. So over the next couple of days, we, as some of you know as well, we submitted a pretty thorough, pretty intensive theological paper a few weeks ago.

So we're going to be, over the next few days, grilling each other mercilessly over our papers. Not really. Hopefully not anyway. But the goal of this workshop is to encourage one another, to challenge one another, to sharpen each other, and to bring somewhat of a sense of the reality of what it will be like in May when we are in a room of probably 20 or so people who have our papers and can ask us whatever they want.

Could be fun. So I am very encouraged. I'm excited. I'm looking forward to it. Valentine's Day is real bad timing. But don't worry. I've prepared in advance.

So please pray for safe travels for everyone. We've got people coming from, I believe someone's coming from Calgary. We've got people coming from B.C., myself, and a few others.

So everybody will be flying in tomorrow or driving if they're in the area. And so for safe travels. And that God would encourage everyone. That God would encourage not only us as ordination candidates, but through us, encourage his churches.

[6 : 11] Through the denominational leaders that we're going to be interacting with over the next few days, encourage them as well in their ministries. So I pray that it would be a good time. So this morning, I purposely did this sermon this week because if you like taking notes, there's a ton of slides this morning.

And lots of points and lots of stuff. And this is why I made sure Connor was on this week because I didn't want to torture Carol or Michelle or Shailene with clicking through slides.

So yeah, quite happily, quite happily, I will indeed torture my own son. So this morning, we're continuing in our sermon series called Discipleship 101, which we started last week.

And through this series, we're going to be looking at the importance of discipleship, both in our individual lives and in our lives as a church body. And as we started with last week, I'll remind us of this each week.

Discipleship is a journey of growth and learning for us as individuals. But it's also a journey that we take as we are disciplined by other people.

[7 : 19] And as we then seek to support and encourage others in their own discipleship journey. Does that make sense? So last week, we considered the question, what is a Christian?

And looking in the book of Acts, we learned that the early Christians, here's a quick summary, we learned that they heard the good news of Jesus, then they made a choice, right?

They believed what they had heard, they turned towards God, and then they received God's grace. Do you remember that, roughly?

We, I hear a yep, that's good. So we also recognize that the next step in the journey for those early Christians was that they became what? Do you remember? Disciples, exactly.

So do you remember what we decided disciples were? They are what? Remember? Followers. Followers of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 25] So we're picking up from there this morning as we consider the question, what is a disciple? Or to put it a different way, if being a Christian means becoming a disciple, then what makes someone a disciple?

Or what identifies someone as a disciple? Are you a disciple? Am I a disciple? How do you know if you're a disciple?

Can you be a disciple? There may be lots of questions that pop into our minds here, and hopefully there are. So let's back up just a little bit. You know my love for words.

Well, the word isn't that commonly used outside of faith communities. You recognize that probably, right? We can recognize that some people probably still refer, or may refer to themselves as disciples of something or someone, right?

A musician, too bad Vern's not here, but Leah is, and Len is. A musician might refer to themselves as a disciple of a more skilled or experienced musician.

[9 : 31] A yoga student might refer to themselves as a disciple of a particular instructor. But the word, when it's used in those situations, I'd say it means something more along the lines of a mentee, and that's not a word we hear that often, but it's someone who's being mentored by

someone else, right?

So you're not necessarily a disciple of the person, but you are a follower of them in terms of their teaching. So you're learning from them. You're being mentored by them. Or at times, I think we may hear the word, or use the word disciple, to mean something like a fan, right?

Now, I'm not saying in any way I'm a disciple of the Edmonton Oilers, but I'm certainly a fan, right? So where does the word disciple come from?

Well, it's obviously a noun. This is obviously a thing, a person. And it comes from the Latin word, *discipulus*, which is just fun to say.

Discipulus. Yeah, feel free. Which is translated as student, learner, or follower is another way it's translated.

[10:46] And it sounds a little bit, or a lot more significant, actually, than fan, right? And as I mentioned last week, the word discipleship that we often hear doesn't actually even appear in the Bible.

And I can't remember if people were shocked or not, but discipleship doesn't appear in the Bible at all. Disciple does, though. And hopefully we recognize that.

And it's found, the word disciple is found in the Bible more than 230 times. Pretty significant. Between the Gospels and the book of Acts, 230 times, more than.

But outside of faith communities, the words disciple and discipleship don't seem to really be that common or familiar, right? You don't hear that word used commonly on the street.

But if you think about a church for a moment, it seems like those words are big for churches, right? They are buzzwords that we use a lot, or that you hear a lot.

[11:50] You hear about discipleship programs and discipleship groups. You hear about making disciples. You hear about being disciples. And those words are definitely part of the Christian vocabulary.

Maybe you've heard how churches need to make disciples. People should be discipling other people. And honestly, I've never been a big fan of creating new words by adding *ing* to the end of a noun.

Disciple *ing*. But last week, we talked about man-on-the-street interviews. Do you remember that? And people's opinions. We talked about that a bit. And I asked us that if we asked the question, what is a Christian, we'd probably get as many opinions and perspectives on that as the number of people we would ask.

And there seems to be, I think it's fair to say, misconceptions about that. And I think the same is absolutely true for the words disciple and discipleship.

So let's consider this for a minute. Discipleship is a bit of an intimidating word, right? It sounds formal. It sounds structured. It sounds like it may have words, or rules, sorry, and a format or a process and expectations.

[13:08] Sounds like there may be step-by-step instructions that you need to follow to get you to the end. Somehow we need to complete that.

It's an apprenticeship, a training program, or something that you might eventually graduate from. But is that it? Is that correct?

That's definitely part of the perspective we have on it because Amazon, go to Amazon and look at, look up the word discipleship and see how many hits you get in terms of the number of discipleship books.

I didn't get to that, but there's lots. I guarantee it. So I'm going to suggest first this morning that there are four main misconceptions about discipleship.

First misconception. Slide. There you go. First misconception that discipleship is all about increasing our understanding of the Bible, our knowledge of the Bible.

[14:14] That we somehow become better disciples by learning more about the Bible. That when we're able to say complicated words like propitiation and justification or sanctification, we've figured it out.

We are good disciples. When we know some Greek or Hebrew words or Latin, as I shared this morning, we're on the right track. Must be, right? When I've completed all the Bible studies, then all the video resources, all the everything, I've arrived.

When I at least know more about the Bible than you, I've got it covered. I don't think that's right.

Second misconception this morning, that discipleship only happens in particular churches that offer special programs and training. Do we have a formal discipleship program at Braemar?

Not until this sermon series. So that's not a knock on anybody and that's not a knock on the churches that do it because it is important and Jesus was clear that discipleship is an important process and something in which we need to be engaged.

[15:32] But to say it happens in particular churches with programs happens best on Sunday morning or maybe Tuesday night. Right? It happens in a sacred time and a sacred place.

So if we're not being discipled in the sanctuary on Sunday morning, it's maybe not happening. That it must involve a resource of some kind beyond scripture.

That it must involve books or videos or a blog or a podcast or some kind of course. That it must take place in a church and that it should ideally be a little bit boring.

Does any of that sound familiar or feel familiar? Third misconception. That discipleship is somehow optional for a Christian. Well, listen to these perspectives.

I need to be discipled between 11 and noon on Sundays or it doesn't work for me. Just, I can't fit it in. Aren't we already saved? So, I didn't expect to have to do other work beyond that.

[16:46] God gets his specific time slot or time slots in my calendar each week and so I'm already doing my part. Any familiar?

Heard those perspectives before? Fourth misconception this morning. That the goal of discipleship is somehow to teach me the rules for being a better Christian.

Is that familiar? It probably is. It's familiar to me. So, give me the rule book. Give me the discipleship manual, the 10-step program. I'll attend that discipleship course.

Tell me all the things I can do and all the things that I can't and I'll follow the rules perfect. Being a disciple will likely be no fun.

But, I have to follow the rules to fit in. Do you recognize any of those misconception perspectives this morning? So, we already know that a disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ, particularly a Christian disciple.

[17:53] But, let's see if we can do a better job of defining it. And, I think Jesus is always the best source to define something like this.

So, we're turning to Luke 9 verses 23 and 24. So, you can turn there or I will read it for us. Then he, Jesus, obviously, said to them all, whoever wants to be my disciple, some translations will say whoever wants to come after me, must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But, whoever loses their life for me will save it. So, Jesus begins there by saying that if anyone wants to follow him, associate with him, if anyone wants to be with him and walk with him, if anyone wants to follow him, remember, that's how we define the word disciple, right?

To follow. Jesus seemed to suggest three requirements there for following him. Let's look at those. First, Jesus says that being his disciple requires us to deny ourselves. So, that idea of self-denial is tough, right?

[19:23] Especially early in the year when we've maybe overindulged at Christmas time around the holidays. Self-denial is associated with Weight Watchers or I need to get back on track.

I need to, it's tough because we have a sense immediately, you hear self-denial and you think, wait a minute, what am I missing out on? So, can't I hear the other options first?

Like, is there another path I can choose that involves less denial? I think we associate self-denial with hardship, right?

Is that fair? That we may think about, well, self-denial involves probably giving up on things that I like, things that I want to do. But friends, it's really about changing our priorities.

It's about changing our focus. So, if you make the pursuit of money a priority, money will, in many ways, rule your life.

[20:26] If you make success or achievement or your career a priority, priority, you'll always seek it. You'll always expect it.

And I've shared before with you that in my past life, in my career, I was always looking for the next step. And I've also assured lots of people that since I became a pastor, my ladder climbing is over. I have no ladder to climb. God's priority. So, whatever we make a priority in our lives, whatever we assign priority is what will rule our lives.

And you may challenge me on that. You may say, well, I can have balance and let God rule, and I can also focus on some other things, but think about it. And Jesus calls us to make him our number one priority.

To look to him and for him first in everything we do. Our second requirement that Jesus gives us is that he says that being his disciple requires total commitment.

[21 : 44] It requires us to take up our cross daily. When Jesus took up his own cross, we recognize that it took his total commitment.

That may seem obvious, but think about it. It took his total commitment to accept the will of the Father, to accept the path that he knew lay before him, and to make that total commitment.

Jesus was totally committed to what God called him to do. totally committed to dying on the cross because he recognized that he was the only way.

He was the only sacrifice that could fully pay the penalty of our sin. I think it's fair in light of that to ask, for him to ask, for our total commitment, isn't it?

I was thinking about that this week as I prepared this sermon, and Jesus isn't asking me to die at the moment, but he is asking me to let go of things.

[22 : 57] He's asking me to trust him. He's asking me to rely on him. Surely I can manage that, can't I, given what he did for me?

Jesus wants us to be totally committed. He wants us to be totally committed to following him and seeking his purpose for our lives every day and in every area of our lives.

Third requirement Jesus gives us, he says that being his disciple requires complete obedience. And he simply says, to reflect that, follow me.

To follow Jesus doesn't mean to just passively walk behind him. It means to recognize the example that he set for us and to follow what he said.

Being a disciple of Jesus is an engaged process. process. It's something we do on our toes, not back on our heels. Following Jesus means hearing what he said and obeying his words.

[24 : 16] It sounds really simple and we all know it's not always. But it's just that clear what he's saying. Hear what I said and do what I said.

Being a disciple of Jesus means actually doing what he calls us to do. Jesus' words in Luke 9 tell us what it means to be his disciple.

But then what is discipleship? That process of making disciples. What does that mean? We're going to take a look at the words of Ephesians 4 11 to 13 and you can follow along in your translation but I'm going to use the message translation for this because I like the words that Eugene Peterson uses in this translation.

Ephesians 4 11 to 13 and it's on the screen if you don't have the message. He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts.

He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work. Working within Christ's body the church, hear this part, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other.

[25 : 44] Efficient and graceful in response to God's son. Fully mature adults. Fully developed within and without.

Fully alive life like Christ. Friends, God has placed people with specific gifts within his church to help other people become disciples of Jesus Christ.

And you may be saying, well, I don't have any gifts. Well, we're going to, I've said a few times over the past couple years, we will get to a spiritual gift process in our church. Do some assessments.

Do some learning together on that. gift. But you've got gifts and a combination of gifts that no one else has. Especially that unique combination, that unique wiring that God's given you, no one else has it.

And it can be used to encourage other people and to be used towards God's mission in the church. Church communities exist so that we can help and encourage one another for works of service.

[26 : 56] it's so that we can be united in faith, in knowledge, in seeking God together. As we help and encourage each other to become mature Christians.

We are, it's a cliché, you've heard it, we are in this together. Being a Christian is not a solo journey. It's a journey with Christ and it's a journey with each other.

more. So I think we can safely say that discipleship happens when Christians help other Christians to become more like Jesus.

So now, knowing what we know, let's look back at the four misconceptions we had this morning to see if we can start to correct them.

First, discipleship is not about increasing our knowledge of the Bible. It's part of it. But it's about increasing our knowledge of God.

[27 : 58] Learning more about the Bible and the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, together in community. But it's more than just about learning, it's more than just about head knowledge, it's about relationship with God and with one another.

God doesn't just want to save us, He wants us to know Him, to experience the fullness of life that we can have with Him, and to have a close and intimate relationship with Him.

Discipleship takes us beyond the truth of the words on the page, and takes us closer to the one who spoke those words and continues to speak those words to us and for us.

Second, discipleship can happen anywhere and at any time. Is that mind-blowing? Have you felt disciplined by someone having coffee with them, having a chat after the service?

Have you felt encouraged and corrected and challenged? That's discipleship, friends. Jesus trained His disciples, and God will train us if we listen to the leading of His Spirit in our lives.

[29 : 24] God is always seeking to use us for His purposes, always. No matter where we are in our day, no matter what point we are in our lives, He will use us if we let Him, if we ask Him.

I'm standing here as a pastor before you now because I said, Lord, I'm done fighting against you. I'm done arguing with you.

I'm done saying no. Boom. There it happened. I stopped fighting, and I'm happier now than I ever was because I said, and this is the scary words, three words, use me, Lord.

He will. So practical discipleship is about doing life together. I mean, it's a cliché that gets used to doing, oh, we're going to do life together.

But it's about welcoming God into every moment, into every relationship in our lives. That's what discipleship is. Third, is discipleship optional?

[30 : 32] Nope. Discipleship is not optional for Christians. All Christians are called to follow Jesus and to seek what Jesus wants us to do, and we've recognized that's a critical part of being a disciple.

God wants each of us to be close to him, to seek his will, and to help others to do the same things as we grow together. father. So finally, the role of discipleship is not to show us the rules to being a better Christian.

The role of discipleship is to teach us how to be more like Jesus. God doesn't want us to just memorize rules and regulations and blindly follow them.

them. Remember how he felt about the Pharisees? Rules and regulations and following without relationship, without compassion, without perspective.

That's Pharisees. Romans 8.29 tells us, for those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

[31 : 59] Paul says in Romans 8.29. So what does God want from us? Well, to put it simply, as we hear the Apostle Paul saying there in that verse in Romans, God wants us to be like his son, right?

God wants us to be like Jesus. And as Jesus disciples, God wants the world to see his son reflected in you and me.

So then from there, what's God's goal in discipleship? Friends, God's goal is for us to grow in community with one another, to encourage and build each other up as we seek to become more like Jesus, and to ultimately be a reflection of Jesus Christ.

Christ. So as we seek to continue in our discipleship journey, both individually and together, let's be people who seek Jesus and welcome him.

Let's be people who trust him with all that we have and all that we are. And then, friends, let's be people who follow him.

[33 : 21] Amen. Amen.