

Discipleship 101: The Practical Stuff

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, March the 6th. So let's take a few moments to talk about Lent this morning. So I don't know if you heard that last song in the set this morning and thought, this feels like an Easter song.

Well, it's not surprising that Vern and Kathy would recognize that it is Lent. We're in the season of Lent. So in conversations with Christian friends over the years, I've come across a wide range of understanding about different parts of the year, different periods in the church calendar.

And some have recognized the formal names that are associated with the Christian church calendar. Obviously and hopefully we recognize Good Friday, Easter, Christmas.

But for some folks who are familiar with other calendar time periods, there are things like Advent, which is the season that leads into Christmas, the coming of Jesus.

And Lent that leads into Easter, that is a time of reflection and repentance as we lead into Easter.

And for people who may come from more traditional liturgical backgrounds, such as Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, some of those traditions, people may also recognize days which just passed this week, like Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Tuesday, if you like, or Ash Wednesday, which happened just as I said a few days ago.

[1 : 34] Shrove Tuesday, people call it Pancake Tuesday because lots of times churches or other organizations will have a pancake supper on Shrove Tuesday during the beginning of Lent. But it's also known in French as, does anybody know?

Mardi Gras. Thank you. Fat Tuesday, which is Mardi Gras in French, right? So that's a literal translation, Fat Tuesday. Because it is the last day of feasting before Ash Wednesday.

And Ash Wednesday traditionally marks the official beginning of the season of Lent. So why is it called Ash Wednesday? Well, it marks the first day of the Lent season, as I said, and it's the beginning of a time of fasting and prayer that leads up to Easter.

And if you've ever wondered why Ash, well, Ash Wednesday derives its name from the tradition of placing ashes on the forehead of people who are participating in an Ash Wednesday service.

And it's usually followed by the words, repent and believe the gospel. Or, this one is even more powerful to me, remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

[2 : 54] It's a reminder of our mortality and our brokenness, but it's also a lead towards the hope of Jesus and the sacrifice of the cross.

And it's interesting to me to note that in many churches, the ashes that are used on Ash Wednesday come from, this is interesting, the burning of the palm leaves that were used in the previous year's Palm Sunday service.

interesting. So I don't see us necessarily burning palm leaves in the sanctuary, but that's interesting to put all those pieces together, right?

So Lent is a 40-day period of fasting, of prayer, of repentance, that begins on Ash Wednesday, and it continues through until Thursday night before Good Friday.

So why 40 days? You might be thinking this already in your head, or you may already have an answer. While it's not specifically prescribed in Scripture, Lent and that 40-day period has become part of the tradition in many Christian churches because it mirrors the 40-day period Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan.

[4 : 10] Does that make sense? It also parallels the 40-day period when Moses fasted and prayed after the Israelites had made the golden calf that they worshipped.

So these 40-day connections are not just by chance. So has that been helpful to give you a bit of context of what Lent is and what it leads towards and some of the significance behind it?

So hopefully you've gotten a bit more context on the season of Lent, which we are now in, and what it means to us as Christians. Well, Pastor Kent, does that mean I need to be fasting now?

Should I not have had breakfast this morning? No, it's not like a medical exam. Were you fasting? Oh, you didn't. You have to come back again. Do I just have to drink water for 40 days from this week until Easter when I eat my ham?

No. No. My answer to you, though, would be ask God what he wants you to do during this season. Because many times over the course of my life, I've come to the recognition...

[5 : 13] What's the word I'm looking for? To the... Thank you. Recognition. Thank you. English major fails. That God may be calling me to fast from something other than food.

We get into food, right? Food is the... But if food is a crutch for you, if food can become a focus of your life... But what about social media? What about Netflix? What about other things that you do? Things that you do on your phone that take up time? Facebook. Scrolling, scroll, scroll, scroll. So, it's about fasting from things that God may be calling you to use to create time in your life.

So, ask God what he might be asking you to do during this season. That's what it's about. Ask him what he is trying to teach you. What he is trying to do in you. So, I challenge each of us to be reflecting on what Good Friday and Easter mean for us now.

Not just a couple of days before. So, this morning we're continuing in our sermon series called Discipleship 101. And through this series, we're continuing to look at the importance of discipleship.

[6 : 24] Both in our individual lives and our lives as a church. So, discipleship is a journey of growth and learning as individuals. And we've talked about that.

But it's also a journey that we take together as we are disciplined by others. And then it's also something that we can become involved in as we seek to support and encourage other people on their own discipleship journeys.

And for several weeks now, we've been talking about disciples and discipleship. We've been setting the context and laying the foundation for what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And we began with defining what is a Christian. And we learned that a Christian is someone who has, I could test all of us, but heard the good news of Jesus Christ.

Has believed that good news. Someone who has turned from the path they were on before. And turned to the Lord. Someone who has experienced the grace of God in their life.

[7 : 30] And has become a disciple of Jesus. And then next we expanded on that last point. And decided, or defined rather, what it means to be a disciple.

What is a disciple? And so we recognize that for someone to be a disciple of Jesus, they have to do what? Anyone?

Thank you. Follow. They have to follow him. Being a disciple requires that we deny ourselves. We looked at that. That we totally commit ourselves and seek to become completely obedient to Jesus in our lives.

We've talked about what the beginning of a discipleship journey looks like. Being called by Jesus. Laying down our nets or the distractions in our lives.

Getting out of the boat. Stepping out of our comfort zone. Stepping out of our comfort zone. Into what Jesus has for us. And then walking with him. Seeking to walk with him in every moment of our lives.

[8 : 32] So then last week we talked about our connection to Jesus. That we are to keep our connection with Jesus. That we are to keep our connection with Jesus. And seek to make us and make it deeper.

Do you remember what the one word is for staying connected to Jesus? Abide. Excellent. We are to keep our connection with Jesus. We are to keep our connection with Jesus. To remain connected with him.

And live in that connection as our primary source for life. Our primary purpose in our lives. And as I suggested last week.

We could consider that we've maybe covered the theory of discipleship. Right? The theory of being a disciple. But I would also say that we've been pretty thorough in that.

I would say we've covered the bases. But I think we'd all agree that theory can only take you so far. Before you need to put it into practice.

[9 : 32] Into action. That's right. So starting today with our sermon titled The Practical Stuff. I like to call a spade a spade. We're going to begin looking at putting the theory into practice.

Taking what we've learned so far. And making it practical. I learned about a discipleship resource a while ago. Called Master Life.

And it includes some ideas and perspectives. That I'm going to mention over the next few weeks. As we get practical. So let's begin by hearing the words of Jesus again. In Luke 9 verse 23.

Then he said to them all. If anyone would come after me. He must deny himself. And take up his cross daily. And follow me.

Jesus tells us explicitly there. That if we want to follow him. And be his disciples. We need to do what? Deny ourselves.

[10:33] Right? Deny ourselves. And follow him. And when we talked before about this idea of denying ourselves. That doesn't mean we somehow lose our identity. Okay?

That's important to recognize. But it means that we are no longer. We are no longer our top priority. Jesus is. Our wants and needs and desires should no longer drive us.

Our decision to follow Jesus has changed us. Fundamentally it must change us. We should become passionate about the things that Jesus is passionate about.

And desire what he desires. That's what it means to be changed by him. So let's dive right in with some hard questions.

Right off the bat. Is Jesus number one in your life? It's rhetorical.

[11:34] I'm not looking for anyone to stand and declare. So recognizing that. Something popped into your head I'm sure. A perspective or a kind of a feeling.

So if not. Can you recognize what you may need to do in your life to change that? Something else is probably right there as well.

Okay? So what drives you? What motivates you? What motivates the direction and the passion in your life? If you can recognize anything other than Jesus driving and motivating you.

Whatever that may be. He, friends, is not your top priority. Your life is then not centered on him.

Does that make sense? The things that motivate us are ultimately the things that shape and control us. Did you catch that?

[12:42] The things that motivate us are ultimately also the things that shape and control us.

Whether that's money or friends or whatever it is.

If we're not motivated by Jesus and our love for him. Then it means we really haven't submitted our lives to him. We really haven't given over full control.

So hopefully, if any of us were asked, we'd say that we'd like to be closer to Jesus. Right? And hopefully you would say that to people other than your pastor.

Gee, Michelle, would you like to be closer to Jesus? Yes, I sure would. Right? You should be able to say that to the average person. Not to say I'm not average.

I'm painfully average. But you shouldn't have to feel guilty in having that conversation with somebody. That we'd like to be closer to Jesus. I would. We'd like to have Jesus be the focus of our lives.

[13:45] Be more of the focus of our lives. I would. But we get distracted. Right? We don't start with Jesus.

And maybe this is true for you. We tend to turn to Jesus as our last resort. When our self-made plans and when our drive for things ultimately falls flat.

We call on Jesus in desperation to bail us out. Perhaps again. We call on Jesus. We call on Jesus.

So recognizing that cycle of getting distracted and drifting away from Jesus.

How do we break out of that cycle if we're seeking to be closer to him? The key to discipleship, friends, is, here it is, submission.

Ultimately, it's about lordship. It's about submitting to Jesus in everything we do. By submitting to Jesus in whatever we do, in every area of our lives, we are declaring it's his.

[14:51] He has control and not us. Remember the words of John 15, verse 5 from last week. I am the vine.

You are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

We need Jesus in everything. And that means we need to recognize and submit to him. This is the lordship piece. Submit to him in everything.

As our lord. As our ruler. As our king. Nothing should be off limits. No matter how significant or insignificant something may be in our lives.

We need to make Jesus lord over all of it. There's nothing in our lives, no area of our lives, where Jesus should not have total control.

[15:55] So how do we tell when Jesus is lord over all areas of our lives or someone else's? Well, I'm going to tell you. When we make Jesus lord over our lives, our lives should reflect.

Here's your three things. Three things. John 13 verses 34 and 35 says, A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another. The lordship of Jesus Christ in someone's life should reflect what?

Love. It's number one on the board. Love. I feel like we should be playing family feud. Survey says, love.

Luke 6 verse 46 says, Why do you call me lord, lord, and not do what I say? The lordship of Jesus Christ should reflect obedience.

[17:02] You can cheat. You can cheat. It's on the screen. So then ultimately there's a natural connection here, a natural flow, that loving Jesus produces obedience.

Produces obedience to him. And then obedience to Jesus produces fruit. Right? So let's take a closer look at each of these three briefly.

Is love passive? It's an honest question. Is love passive? No. I see some head shakes. Love takes action. It takes intention.

It takes movement and change. When we love someone, we often long to be with them. Right? Michelle and I were apart when I was in Vancouver.

It was only a few days. But it turns out we kind of like each other still. We long to be with each other. Right? We're each other's friend. We like each other's company.

[18:03] We like being challenged by one another. So to love Jesus then means we need to spend time with him. Right? It's that simple. It really is.

That relationship between us and Jesus is no different than any other one in our lives. And that means we need to devote time to spend with the Lord every day.

And here comes the pastory kind of talk. Schedule it in your calendar if necessary. You work out. Spend time with Jesus. I schedule meetings.

I schedule appointments. You schedule going to the doctor. It doesn't somehow make you a bad Christian to say time with Jesus. 10 to 12. 10 to 11. 10 to 10.

15. Whatever it is. But if you don't schedule it. For me the first things that fall off are my prayer life at times. Now this is before being a pastor.

[18:57] My prayer life and working out. And getting enough sleep. Which should be at the top. Right? Should be at the top. If you have no nothing in your bucket to give.

How do you give to anyone else? How do you stay motivated? How do you stay fueled if you're not plugged into the source of your life? Which is Jesus. So it's not about quantity.

Hear me on this. But quality. So don't set yourself up with, I need to spend one hour with Jesus every day. For the next, whatever it is.

For the rest of my life. Will you fail? Potentially. Will you succeed? Maybe. But don't set yourself up for failure. Jesus doesn't expect, I need an hour.

I need, He's not standing there going, I need an hour of your time every day. Or we're getting nowhere. He doesn't say that. How often do you phone someone you deeply care about.

[20:02] That you've known all your life. And talk for 10 minutes. And that's the best 10 minutes of your day. If that's what you've got. He gets it. But start somewhere. Right?

Start somewhere. Block out dedicated time to spend alone with God. And I've told you before, a lot of times my time with God is listening, getting by myself, and listening to the words of praise and worship music.

Because I've got a playlist that I built in Spotify that actually speaks to my soul in meaningful ways. So I can spend half an hour listening to that music, be weeping, and feel like I've spent time with Jesus, and I didn't open my Bible necessarily.

But we connected in a way that He and I need to connect. So if there's shorter times in your day that work, do that. But try to schedule it.

Because it will drop off otherwise. And make it a priority. Focus on it. Spend time doing it. And recognizing, you know, I talked about this in our stewardship series.

[21:08] We invest our time. And our time is a precious, non-renewable resource that we tend to ignore. So if you can spend an hour watching TV, or multiple hours watching TV, or whatever it is,

look at carving some of that time out to spend with God.

But start with prayer. That's the best place to start. And then include some Bible reading as well. Start at the beginning of a book.

Start with 1 John if you want. Start at the beginning of a book, and work your way through. Be methodical if that's the way it works for you. Take notes if that's your thing.

Take notes of words or passages that jump out to you as you read. Because if you're engaged, God will speak to you through His Word. I guarantee it. Pray to close your time with God.

And I'm not saying, Oh Lord, Thou art so great. You know, I'm saying, have a conversation. Say, God, You showed up in my day in this way.

[22 : 18] Thanks for doing that. Or, God, I blew it in such and such. I lost my cool with someone, and that was not okay. Forgive me for doing that.

And help me to do better next time. When you spend time with God, take that time, then at the end, to reflect on what He said to you.

I've started to adopt something that's known as the spiritual examine. Sounds very formal, very structured. It was developed centuries ago by, it's most familiar as being associated with Ignatius of Loyola.

And so I don't want to say Saint Ignatius, because that makes Protestants nervous. But he is recognized as the founder of of a Catholic religious order.

But he's a deeply godly, deeply spiritual man who figured out a way that worked for him to deconstruct his day every day. So he would look at where God showed up, where he missed something, where he failed in some way.

[23 : 27] So he would be honest about that. And so as I learn more about it, maybe I'll take us through it at some point. But it's very, to me, it's very structured. But it's also got room for just conversation with God.

So the spiritual examine, E-X-A-M-E-N, if you want to Google it at all. There's not a ton of great resources on it, because people seem to have adopted it and it became part of their way of doing life.

But yeah, I may share that with you at some point. So as we've recognized, when we love Jesus, then obedience should naturally flow from that.

So when we love Jesus and spend time with him, we more naturally should want to follow his teaching. We more naturally want to obey him, quite likely.

And that's a key aspect of discipleship. Jesus doesn't want us to just follow a set of rules. It's not what he wants. Jesus is not looking for rule-following robots.

[24 : 34] Jesus wants us to align ourselves with what he is doing in the world and seek to be used by him. When we obey what Jesus has said, we're more likely to find ourselves in situations and circumstances where we can see God at work.

Does that make sense? If you are listening and watching for God at work, you'll see him. I'm constantly amazed by God, and I've talked about this before, God winking at me.

Talked about it last week or two weeks ago. Every so often, God will show up in my life in a way that's just like a little wink, a little, hi, I'm right here.

It's pretty cool. Does it mean I'm perfect? No. Does it mean I don't wish I could be closer to God in other ways? No, because I definitely want that.

But when you're watching for God at work, when you're expecting God to work in your life and the lives of others, you will see it. You will see it. Have you ever noticed that some people seem to notice God at work and maybe you feel like you don't or you feel like, oh, that just happened.

[25 : 56] Things just aligned perfectly at random. What I think it comes down to is obedience. So when you love Jesus and you're willing to do whatever he asks you to do, you're more likely, as I said a moment ago, to find yourselves in places where God can use you.

And remember, I've said to you before, some of the most dangerous words you can utter are, God, use me and mean it. So that's my encouragement to you is seek to be used by God and then watch how he works.

So how can you incorporate obedience into your life? Well, hopefully it's going to sound simple because it comes down to knowing the commands of Christ and then doing what he commands.

Seems simple, right? Seems like a parent and children. So when we spend time with Jesus in God's word, his direction and his commands for us will become more clear.

I have some homework for you today. Doesn't have to be done immediately after church however that's ideal. What might be one step that you personally can take today to obey Jesus' commands in your life?

[27 : 26] And then what's one step that you can take to become a more obedient disciple? What might be one step you can take today to obey Jesus' commands for you?

And what's one step you can take to become a more obedient disciple? That's your homework. I won't check it next week, but that's your homework. So we've recognized that love produces obedience and obedience produces fruit.

So our job then, friends, is as the great old hymn says, trust and obey. Jesus will supply everything we need to accomplish what he wants.

And that's the result of our obedience. Then, the things that take place when we are obedient to Jesus, that is fruit.

fruit. We obey Jesus and our families, our workplaces, our most important human relationships, our church will change.

[28 : 38] We obey and Jesus will produce the fruit. Our love for Jesus produces obedience to his commands and his direction for our lives.

Our love for Jesus should compel us to spend more time with him. And then, as we spend more time with Jesus, our priorities will continue to become more and more aligned with his.

And then, when we obey Jesus, God will use us to change the lives of those around us, change our own lives, and ultimately to change the world.

folks, that is the practical stuff. This is what the practical life of a disciple looks like.

So, hearing that, are you prepared to step up and into a more loving, obedient, and fruitful life?

[29 : 45] Are you willing to deny and submit yourself so that Jesus can work through you? Are you ready to see the supernatural power of God at work in your life?

If you are, then it's time to step up and make Jesus your number one priority. Amen.