

Discipleship 101: The Word

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 13th. So as I mentioned last week, Daylight Saving Time begins today, or more accurately, it began at 2 a.m. this morning.

So some of you may have wound up being extra early for church. I didn't see that many, but some. And others may not even be here yet. So maybe we can gather in the parking lot outside afterwards or by the doors, and we can pretend we're about to start.

Or, just in case anyone forgot, but seriously though, as I prayed, be kind to yourself and to others this week, because you may not feel it today, but you will feel it in the days ahead.

I was saying to Pearl and Sherwin, who are fellow Oilers fans this morning, at the end of the second period of that hockey game, the adult part of my brain said, the adult pastor part of my brain said, I need to go to bed now.

Did I? No. Do I ever get it? Kinda. But that's okay. And this extra hour of daylight that we've gained at the end of the day will hopefully ease our pain a bit.

[1 : 11] 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, both in our individual lives and in our life as a church.

And we've recognized that discipleship is a journey of growth and learning for us as individuals. But it's also a journey we take together as we're disciplined by others. And as we seek to support and encourage other people within our church family on their own discipleship journeys.

And as we begin this morning, I want to share some words from author John Ortberg. You may have heard of him. As he reflected on discipleship. So Ortberg says, As best we can discern, Ortberg continues, The Bible indicates the disciples were with Jesus for about three years.

So let's assume they were with him. Ortberg's math here. Ten hours a day. And for the sake of argument, let's say they had a couple of days off each month. Jesus was a good boss, I think.

So that would have given them roughly 340 discipleship days each year. So let's do the math, Ortberg says. Ten hours a day, 340 days per year, times three years.

[2 : 49] 10,200 hours of discipleship time with Jesus. Pretty neat, eh? So we can recognize then that being a disciple of Jesus involves committing to a relationship.

Investing time with the one who cares most about us and knows us more deeply and intimately than anyone else. But we can also recognize that this is time well spent.

As I said last week, over the weeks ahead as we continue in Discipleship 101, our series, I'll be referring to some things from a discipleship source called Master Life.

And this is on the screen now-ish. There it is. It's called the Disciples' Cross.

And you can see the name in the bottom corner right there. So the Disciples' Cross is a teaching tool that was created by a man named Avery Willis.

[3 : 51] And if you Google, do a Google search for Disciples' Cross, and I see some people grabbing their phones, so you might be doing that now, you will find literally dozens of this kind of diagram.

But I found this one to be most clear. Yeah, you're saying, yeah, that's about as clear as mud. Most clear, and as we unpack it together over the coming weeks, you'll understand what I mean.

So Willis created this tool to help other people teach what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. So if you're a visual learner like I am, like I know many of you are, some sort of a visual diagram like that can be particularly helpful.

So take a look at this, and you'll see there's a lot of detail here, and a lot of little sections, and yes, we will cover it. So don't worry about being able to read the fine print.

You probably can't. So the Disciples' Cross is quite a detailed resource. But as we explore it together, you'll recognize that we've already considered some of the verses.

[4 : 56] There's verses indicated on here in several places. You'll recognize that we've covered some of those already, and some of the content that we've covered in other parts of the series have been there because we've been talking about disciples and discipleship for quite a while now.

And maybe you're wondering why we're spending so much time on it, so much time on this topic, digging into it in so much detail. And maybe you're even getting tired of the discussion.

I hope not, but maybe you are. So as our quote from John Ortberg said this morning, discipleship involves intentional investment of time, but it is time well spent.

Some of you have heard me say in various ways, probably over the last three years, that I believe our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ may tend to be a bit thin.

A bit thin. And I believe most of us recognize the personal salvation part, right? That sounds pretty good to us, right? That's something that I can take comfort in.

[6 : 06] I can take personal assurance in. It's probably a big relief to most of us that we can take comfort in that grace of Christ for us.

But the church, particularly in the West, and I don't just mean Western Canada here, but the Western part of the world, the church seems to have largely gotten stuck on that point.

So we're often good at sharing the essentials of the gospel with someone, explaining how the gospel works, what it means, how accepting the truth of Jesus Christ has changed our lives personally.

Hopefully we can do that. Maybe even to the point where we talk about, we talk with people about being willing to follow Jesus in their own life, what that looks like.

But then I believe we get stuck. It's after that part, after that decision part, that things seem to become a challenge for us for some reason.

[7 : 07] And the church may be good at encouraging people to make a decision to follow Jesus, but our weakness seems to come in knowing what to do for people after that decision.

Is that fair? Can you maybe even recognize that? And I don't know about your personal experience, but for me, it seems like after someone makes a decision to follow Jesus Christ in their life, they may do nothing.

And that's not a shot at anyone. But as followers of Jesus Christ, we're called to share the good news of God's plan to redeem all of humanity, all of creation through Jesus.

That's the next step for us. And our personal salvation, our personal relationship with Jesus is absolutely an important part of that.

We have been changed by Jesus. And it's part of the church's responsibility to guide people towards making that decision. But that's not the end of our responsibility.

[8 : 16] Some of you may also come to hear me say that the perspective of many Christians and many churches may be that the job is or the goal is to get people's eternity ticket validated.

Many of you have heard me talk about getting someone a ticket and then they just wait at the bus, right? Maybe you've done that in your own life. You're going, well, Jesus is coming back eventually. I don't need to worry about most of this stuff. So tick-tock, I guess. But we can't just leave people waiting at the bus stop for their departure time.

That's not what it's about. Let's hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 28, verses 18 and 19 after his resurrection. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

[9 : 24] And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age. So Jesus is pretty clear here, I think, that our responsibility as the church, our responsibility as individual Christians, is not to sit on the sidelines, but to get in the game.

To help people find a way to becoming a follower of Jesus. To be deepening their relationship with Jesus.

And this is a big part, this probably won't surprise you, a big part of my job as your pastor. To encourage each of you, to remind you and challenge you.

And that's a big part of why we're doing this series. I want each of you to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ. I don't want you to just be believers.

You've heard me talk about being fans before. I want each of us, each of you, to be passionate followers of Jesus Christ. So that's why we're spending time in this.

[10:34] So carefully, so thoroughly. Because I want your relationship with Jesus Christ to be vital and passionate and fully committed. I want to see you commit and submit to the things that will make you into the person that Jesus has called you to be.

And folks, I'm definitely not naive enough to think that all I need to do is keep bombarding you with information in this series and you'll just absorb it by osmosis.

But I do believe that if I do my best to make it clear to you what the steps and actions are that you can take in your life to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ, it will plant some seeds in you.

I believe that. And that the Holy Spirit can then take those seeds and grow them into passionate, fruit-producing, disciple-shaped lives.

And as that continues to develop in you, God can use you, will use you, to grow his kingdom and draw people to him.

[11:47] And so with that in mind, we're going to use that disciples' cross for the next few weeks to help you find your way to becoming a true and intentional follower of Jesus.

We'll get Connor to leave that for a second. And so can I have this is what you're saying? Yes, you can. But I'm a teacher that will not give you the answers till the end.

So yes, I will make copies of this available, but I don't want anybody working ahead. We're going to work it through together, if that makes sense. So the disciples' cross represents the life of a disciple, the life of a follower of Jesus.

So the center is a circle. My pointer doesn't want to work. The center is a circle, right? So that represents the center of a disciple's life.

And at the center of that circle is Jesus Christ. And we've talked about that already a few times. To be a disciple, Jesus needs to be at the center of all that we are, all that we do.

[12:55] Jesus needs to be our number one priority. And as you can maybe see, the verse there is John 15, 5, I am the vine, you are the branches, right?

Which is an anchor verse for our series. So that's there. So there's, in a cross, there are two axes. There's a vertical axis and a horizontal axis.

And sometimes that's what you need to chop wood. Axis. Nah. It was weak. So that, so the vertical axis is obviously vertical, up and down.

Horizontal axis is side to side. So this, the, on a disciple's cross, the vertical axis, axis, sorry, represents our relationship with Jesus.

Our relationship with God, that vertical axis. With Jesus as the center of our life, we're grounded in the word. And then we reach up to God through prayer.

[14:00] And so we're going to focus a little bit more narrowly this morning. The horizontal axis, axis then represents our relationship with people. And we'll get to that in the coming weeks.

So with Christ at the center of our life, we'll cultivate relationships with other believers. And that's the part we'll look at in the coming weeks. So part of the disciple making process is fellowship with other people who follow Jesus Christ.

It's not surprising, but the horizontal axis also represents our relationships with our witness to people who are not followers of Jesus, people who don't know him.

So it's important to recognize that being a follower of Jesus involves leading other people to become followers of Jesus in their own life. I think that makes sense.

So over the course of our series so far, I've said many times that we need to make Jesus the center of our life. I've said it a few times this morning. And that's the foundation of being a disciple.

[15:02] That's a given in everything we've looked at together. And I think we can all agree that you're not a disciple in the truest sense of what we've come to understand.

If Jesus isn't the center of your life, if he isn't your number one priority. So after a brief focus on the disciples cross, the big picture, we're going to focus on the vertical axis today, specifically the bottom section.

And so there it is. So there's the center. It's a little bit blurry, zoomed in, sorry, but there's the vine and branches verse. And here is our focus for this morning.

So we're focusing on, and you see the vine and branches verse there, which is an important anchor verse for our series. Our sermon this morning is titled, The Word. And we're going to recognize that a disciple must be grounded in the word.

And the word we're talking about is the word of God, the Bible. As I mentioned last week, the key to discipleship is also lordship, making Jesus Lord, giving him control and submitting to him in all areas of your life, no matter how big or small they might be.

[16:21] And we make the focus, make Jesus the focus of our lives because we love him. And because we want him to live in and through us.

So the key to having Jesus Christ living in you is to have his word in you. The key to having Jesus Christ live in you is to have his word in you.

Jesus talks about his word and his disciples in John 8, 31 and 32. He says to the, it's sorry.

It says to the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

True disciples live in, abide in, as we've used in previous, previously in our series, they abide in the word of God.

[17:26] God's word is like food for us. You know, we hear that over and over in scripture. It's food for a disciple and we can't grow without taking that in. We can't grow in Jesus.

We can't even ultimately know Jesus in a meaningful way without the word of God. Jesus says in John 14, six, that he is the truth.

Truth is not a set of rules for us. Truth is a person. So when we dig into God's word, we grow in our understanding of God's truth and we'll grow in our relationship with Jesus.

The way we grow in the knowledge of and relationship with Jesus is spending time, as I said, in God's word. And as we discussed last week, daily time, undistracted time, scheduled time, if necessary, talked about just like you have to schedule meetings or workouts or anything like that. Schedule that time. Don't feel guilty about it. It's creating priority in your life. Schedule time with Jesus. So quickly recognizing this is important.

[18:46] Why do we need to spend time with Jesus daily? Why do we need to do that? Well, there's four reasons we're going to look at briefly this morning. First, we need time to get to know God.

That's reality. Most people have their own ideas about God. Those ideas and opinions are generally formed with little to back it up.

So maybe your opinions of God are formed based on how you have perceived him working, or perhaps not working in your life. But our perceptions of God are generally formed based on concepts or ideas.

So when we, but when we spend time with God daily in his word, we truly get to know him. You get to know God's character, his actions, the things that are important to him, and should be important to disciples of Jesus.

Our knowledge of him, when we spend time in the Bible, our knowledge of God becomes fact rather than opinion. It becomes based on experience, based on invested time, based on a deepening relationship.

[20:02] And it takes time to do that. Second, when we're consistently spending time in God's word, he will guide us and direct us.

Spending time in God's word isn't just a checked box. Like I said, it's probably not a bad idea to schedule it, to make it a priority, but it will change you.

And we recognize there's no shortage of advice in our world, right? There's no shortage of advice from people who will tell you how to live your life. Ten steps.

We love steps, right? I've said that before. Human beings love steps. How do I get from here to here? Give me five ways. Give me five rules, ten steps, I need to get from A to B, and I can't do it on my own.

And you likely also know people who are happy to give you advice, right? To tell you how you should live your life. Everybody, I see some, I perceive smiles in people's eyes.

[21:07] You know these people, right? Maybe you are one of these people. So, sometimes you may even recognize that someone who tends to give you advice should maybe begin by taking it themselves, right?

Is that? I see more smiles. So, the reality is, are these random sources of guidance, random sources of direction, random things that are prioritized in different ways, should they really be the things that we lean on for advice and wisdom for living our lives?

Seems shaky? Maybe, maybe, right? But when we spend time in God's word regularly, we learn how God advises us to live our lives.

Seems to me to make sense to read the owner's manual to know how to operate correctly, right? I'm no engineer, but I read instructions.

The Bible is instruction, wisdom, learning, guidance, context for our lives. And yet it sits on the shelf sometimes.

[22 : 25] So, when we spend time in God's word, we learn how God advises us, as I said, to live our lives. Isn't that the most trustworthy source we could possibly have?

God has no hidden agenda for us. It's pretty hard, I think, to live the way God wants us to live, if we don't take the time to learn the guidance and direction that he has for our lives.

Right? We're operating in the dark. And so that clarity, that direction, that guidance that comes from scripture, comes when we spend time reading it.

Praying over it. Spending time dedicated to it. Third, we need time to bring our wants, our needs, and our desires to the Lord.

That's reality. How many times in your life, in the past two and a half years particularly, have you felt overwhelmed? Have you felt like you had nowhere to turn for support, or encouragement, or context, or perspective?

[23 : 40] Felt like you were hurting deeply in some way, and no one else could possibly begin to understand. When we spend time with God in his word, he is always right there with us.

Only God knows our deepest longings and hurts, the things that we struggle with most. Only God fully understands what is going on in our hearts and our minds.

That's it. No one else possibly can. God is the one with whom we can be the most vulnerable and transparent, because he knows all our stuff already.

Have you ever confided in someone, trusted someone, and had it come back to you through another channel? Stings, right?

God doesn't do that. The ultimate confidant you can have in your life is your Heavenly Father.

Fourth, we need time alone with God to see him make a difference in us, to recognize that he is working in us.

[25 : 02] Because every day, we are surrounded by situations and circumstances where God can use us to make a difference. You've heard me say that before.

People all around us, folks, need to know Jesus. It's probably not a shock. You probably interact with people every day that don't know Jesus, don't have God in their life, and they are hurting and struggling, and God can use you to bring healing there.

I believe that when we're not focused on God in our lives, we can very easily miss moments and opportunities where we can bring God into a situation.

And I think that comes from being distant from him. If God is not the focus of our life, if Jesus is not the first place we go, then he's obviously, or is often, I should say, the last thing we bring up, the last person to whom we turn.

But if our hearts and minds are oriented towards the Lord, just as a matter of course, we begin to see situations as God sees them.

[26 : 24] Have you ever had that? Had a moment where you were in a situation and you actually perceived that you were seeing something in the way that God saw it?

Have you ever been super annoyed by someone and taken a moment to stop and think, see them the way God sees them? It will change your perspective instantly. Instantly.

When you're spending time in God's word every day, you will be immersing yourself, baptizing yourself, I'll say, in the things of God.

God's priorities will become your priorities. God's focus and perspective on a situation will become more easily aligned with your own.

So thinking back on the section of the disciples cross that we've looked at this morning, the key to this, all of this, is grounding ourselves in God's word.

[27 : 27] And so if the goal is to ground ourselves in God's word, to get into the regular habit of meeting with God in this way, how do we do that?

Well, as I suggested last week and again this morning, schedule time for it. And many of you have, I'm sure. Find a spot where it's just you and the Lord.

Doesn't have to be a closet. Doesn't have to be a sanctuary. Doesn't have to be anywhere special. But I bet you have a spot, or I bet you have a place where you feel at peace.

Bring God there. Have a plan on what you want to read. If that's not something you've ever done before, never said, okay, I'm going to sit down and read scripture.

If you're a methodical person or a list person or an organized person like I am, start at the beginning of a book. Great place to start. Start at the beginning of a book and work your way through.

[28 : 27] Have a bit of a plan for how you want to spend your time so that you're not focused and distracted. So that you are, let's try that again, focused and not distracted.

Have a plan. You know, I think we tend to, when it comes to spending time with God, we tend to wing it. We tend to free form it a little bit. And that works for lots of people.

You know, they're just able to resonate with God in their heart. But for lots of us, right, do you become distracted? Do you start to drift off? Do you start to lose focus?

Don't pray lying down in bed at the end of the night, probably. Have you ever done that? I've done that. Prayed at the end of the night, lying in bed, super comfy, dark, time alone with God.

I'm asleep. It's good. I mean, he's good with it. I'm sure he chuckles because it happens all the time, I'm sure. And if that's the best time for you, that works too.

[29 : 26] But have a plan. Know how you want to spend your time. And it's not artificial to do that. Start with prayer. Orient your heart towards God in a conversation.

It doesn't have to be perfect words, as I've said many times. You don't need to start with, Oh, Lord, I beseech thee. Speak your words to your God.

Got it? Your words to your God. Read. Read scripture. Actually read it. And take notes.

Again, it's not artificial to do that. Be aware of thought. You know, I'm not the kind of person that God speaks to me. Bam. Charlton Heston voice in my head.

Doesn't happen. But I will take notes because a thought will pop into my head that is not my thought. So that's God talking to me in a different way.

[30 : 26] So take notes of what God may be saying to you as you read scripture. And close your time in prayer. Easy, right? Bracket your time with God in prayer.

And again, it's a conversation. Your words to your God. My friends, God wants to use us.

I'm going to hammer that point over and over and over as long as I'm here. Because that's true. He wants to use us. He wants to partner with us. He wants to use us.

I don't care how old, young, whatever you are. God wants to use each of us. He will use each of us to be catalysts for change.

Can you recognize that? That God wants to use you that distinctly, that powerfully? Because it's true. As catalysts for change in your situations and your circumstances.

[31 : 29] And by spending time in the word, spending time with God in his word, we'll be in training. In training to be people that God can and will use to make a difference in the world.

Amen.