

Discipleship 101: Witness

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Date: 03 April 2022

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, April 3rd. Welcome here whether you're joining us in person or you're tuning in online later on during the week or today through our various other channels, our sermon phone-in service, our podcast, or other channels.

Well, 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.

Discipleship is a journey of growth and learning for us as individuals, but it's also a journey that we take together as we're disciplined by others.

And as you look at the screen, I hope you've been able to see this graphic enough that you're starting to memorize it. Nice try, Pastor Kent, right? Or at least it's becoming more and more familiar to you.

Do you remember what it's called? Well, there's probably some guesses. It's called the Disciples' Cross. And it's a teaching tool developed by a man named Avery T. Willis.

[1 : 11] So Willis' goal for this was for people to be able to use this diagram to remind themselves of key elements of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And if you're listening online or checking it out later, you can just Google Disciples' Cross and you'll get dozens and dozens of images that will give you an idea of what we're talking about in this series.

So the goal was to show what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, the different elements that are involved in that, and to learn how to bring those elements into an individual's life.

And these elements help us to become and to continue to grow as disciples. Well, many of you know that before I became a pastor, I had a long career in communications, marketing, and media relations.

Right? That's familiar to lots of you. I worked for organizations that were guided by mission statements and goals and objectives and budget projections and strategies for audience growth and engagement and so many other factors that were used to measure success.

[2 : 22] But do you know what I've come to recognize over the years? I've come to recognize that at some point, particularly in the Western world, we came to apply many of those same measurements to the church.

And I believe there's a danger there of becoming prideful and seeking our own success, our own measurements of success, or measuring things in the church by human standards, rather than according to God's will and God's plan for His church.

Friends, Brammer isn't my church. It's the church where I am a member. It's the church where I attend and fellowship and worship God. It's the church where I serve God and where I serve the congregation as pastor.

And even if you have attended here or been a member here for 50 years or more, Brammer isn't your church either. This is God's church.

And it's His will we want in this place, not our own. So there's no question that we want it to be a vibrant community, and some of that involves people and numerical growth, right?

[3 : 38] We recognize that that's a valid thing. We also have financial expenses, and those are the reality of being stewards of what God has given us in this place.

And we need to keep track of, be aware of, our financial realities. But we always need to guard against our success or achievement or blessing or whatever measurement it is, being shaped by how we view those things, how we measure them versus how God measures things.

And even pastors aren't immune to this because one of the first questions pastors tend to ask each other, and I'm going to back up for a second, what do men often ask each other?

What's one of the first questions a man will ask another man when they first meet? Well, first of all, you say, Hi, my name is Kent. Your name is Steve. Okay, Steve, nice to meet you.

Then usually the next question is four words. What do you do? Right? That's probably familiar. And that's not a weird kind of, I need to determine whether your value as a human being, as a male, is better than mine because of your job or because of how much money you make.

[5 : 00] Sometimes that's a factor. But the reality there is we're just trying to determine identity or who someone is or what they're about or what their skills are like.

And so we ask that question, what do you do? So even pastors aren't immune to this because I've come to recognize that one of the first questions that a pastor will ask another pastor is, any guesses?

How big is your church? Right? And it's not necessarily a prideful question. Sometimes it is. You know, you meet someone as a pastor of a church of 20 or 50 or whatever, under 100, you meet someone who's a pastor of a church of 500 or 1,000, and you think, whoa, that's impressive, that's whatever, you know, I wish that were me.

All of those things are factors. But how big is your church is the question. So I have another question for you. Do you think God cares how big a given congregation is?

Do you think he looks at smaller churches with disappointment or at larger churches with satisfaction? Well, I can only speak for myself, but I truly do not think that he does that.

[6 : 22] In 1 Samuel, we read about, not surprisingly, Samuel was the last prophet of God who is tasked with choosing a new king of Israel to replace King Saul.

And if you know the Old Testament, if you know the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, you'll know, and the story of King Saul, you'll know that King Saul didn't pan out that well, right, to say the least.

And we won't go into that. But the story may be familiar to you, but it reminds us of something truly important. As Samuel is considering candidates for this new king, for this replacement king, he measures by his own standard.

And God reminds him in 1 Samuel 16, verse 7, the Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. So while this relates specifically to Samuel's seemingly superficial personal standards for considering Israel's king, right, he's looking at how tall, how strong, how healthy, how young, how vibrant, whatever, I believe this applies more broadly, this idea, more broadly to God's perspective on things versus a human one.

[7 : 50] Do you think God wants our sanctuary to be packed on Sunday mornings? Or is that something that we primarily want?

Do you think he wants us to have so much money that we can plant another church somewhere in the city? Or would that be something that we would want, something that we would measure success by?

So I have an honest question for you this morning. What do you think the goal of our church should be? If we pair it right down to the basics, I believe our goal in this place should be to love God and to love others.

Is that fair? And our goal as a church, my goal as your pastor should be to make disciples of Jesus who make more disciples of Jesus.

Would you say that's also fair? So our goal should be to raise up people who follow Jesus in such a way that others want to know Jesus and follow him too.

[9 : 08] And ultimately, that's God's goal as well. For more people to come to know him and to share the hope and truth of his saving grace because friends, that will literally change the world.

So we've been concentrating on this topic for two months, about two months now, in our sermon series Discipleship 101. We've talked about what is a disciple.

How do I become a disciple? How do I continue to grow in that journey? And this teaching tool, the Disciples Cross, that we've been looking at has helped us to answer those questions and I believe put them into context.

Connect the dots, if you will. And along the way, I've also tried to give us some suggestions for practical ways that we can start doing the things we need to do as disciples of Jesus.

So let's have another quick review. A disciple of Jesus has to have Jesus, has to have him as what? The center of their life.

[10 : 21] Jesus has to be number one. And the rest of our lives, the other pieces of our life, need to flow around Jesus being our number one, our top priority.

So just as Jesus is at the center of the Disciples Cross, image, that graphic, Jesus has to be at the center of a disciple's life.

So once Jesus is at the center, we move to the bottom part of that vertical axis of the Disciples Cross. And that bottom section represents the need for a disciple to be grounded in the Word of God.

And that Word is, as we've explored, that Word is the Bible. And do you remember what I said last week? That the Bible, I got this quote, I can't remember who it was from off the top of my head at the moment, but the Bible is not an accessory in the life of a disciple.

It's a necessity. So it's not just something we carry around, tucked under our arm with gold monogramming on the front, and never open. The binding creaks when you open it because it's never been cracked open.

[11 : 37] But we recognize that we need to spend time daily in the Word of God with the Lord. And when we do that, there's four things that happen that we looked at.

We get to know the Lord. We get to know who He is, His character, and what He's like. We begin to receive guidance and direction from Him through His Word. We bring our needs and desires to the Lord when we explore the Word with Him.

And we begin to see God make a difference not only in our lives, hopefully that's the first thing, but then in the lives of others as well as we interact with them.

So then the upper part of the vertical axis we moved into represents prayer, which is also a necessity for a disciple of Jesus. And we talked about the fact that prayer is when a disciple literally comes into the holy and awe-inspiring presence of God.

Right? This is not just something we do at the dinner table, not something we just, we're removed from God and this prayer is a tenuous connection. When we engage with God in prayer, we come before Him.

[12 : 52] We come into His presence. And when we pray correctly, as we explored in that section, four things are involved. And I'd ask you if you know, if you remember them, but I'm going to go through them with you, for you.

So we begin with thanksgiving and that's thanking God not for what He has done for us at that point, but for who He is, for His character, for His qualities, for the fact that He is almighty and all-powerful and all-knowing and all of those qualities of God.

And then we move from thanksgiving into praise, where we praise Him for what He has done. We recognize what He has done for us and for others.

And then we move from praise into confession. And confession, as we talked about, and I think this is such a powerful way of looking at it, confession is actually agreeing with God on the nature of our sin.

So agreeing with God of where we've made a bad decision, where we've chosen our path over His for our lives. And so, God knows where we have sinned.

[14 : 12] God knows where we have turned away and walked away. So we're agreeing with Him in that moment, agreeing that we recognize that we have done that as well.

And then we move from confession to asking, which involves two aspects. One is petition, which is asking for ourselves, asking for our own needs.

And then intercession, which is asking for others. And then last week, we moved to the right side of the horizontal axis, which represents fellowship.

fellowship, fellowship being our relationship with others. And as we learn, Jesus never intended for us to be by ourselves on the journey.

Being a disciple means we're part of a community, we're part of a body, we're part of a church, we're part of a family. And the local church is the place God always intended, excuse me, for us to be part of a living relationship with Jesus and with other people in fellowship in the local church.

[15 : 26] And fellowship in community with other believers creates a safe place, ideally, that's the goal, right? It creates a safe place for accountability where we can, through love and relationship, hold one another accountable.

Where we can experience renewal and healing and encouragement and support and all of those great things. And then relationship, right? We build, we do life together, we learn together, we grow

together, we share experiences together.

And so this morning we're moving to the left horizontal axis of the disciples' cross and our sermon is titled Witness. Our focus verse this morning is John 15, verse 8, where we read, this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

So according to that verse, what proves we are a disciple? Our fruit, right? And what is the greatest fruit we exhibit in our lives?

Well, Jesus helps us with this. He says in John 13, verses 34 and 35, a new command I give you, love one another.

[16:46] As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, by loving one another, all men will know that you are my disciples if you have done it, if you love one another.

And Jesus says that loving one another is the fruit in our lives that will both prove we are his disciples and will also point others to him.

And so friends, we recognize, I'm going to take some pressure off you here, hopefully, fruit is not something we fake. We can't even try to fake it or make happen something.

Fruit in our lives, this kind of fruit we're talking about, is a natural byproduct that God creates in and through us when we follow him.

So when we're connected to him, this fruit is a natural byproduct that comes from that. It's Jesus at the center and the focus of our lives that provides the seed for that fruit to grow.

[17:56] And when we're grounded in his word, we have the fertilizer, the food, to make that seed flourish. When we're in fellowship with other believers, sometimes this part can sting, the weeds can be pulled, the weeds of our lives.

And so we do not produce fruit on our own. We can't produce fruit on our own. It's our job, though, to put ourselves in a state of mind, a state of heart, a way of behaving where the Holy Spirit can produce fruit in us.

So it won't surprise you that I'm coming here now. So what does this Holy Spirit fruit look like? Well, let's hear the words of Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23.

And say it with me if you know it. You may not. But the true fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, sorry, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, or goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So when Christ is at the center of our lives and we're in the Word, we're anchored in the Bible and Scripture, when we're praying, when we're in fellowship with other disciples, these qualities, these fruit qualities, will become fruity people.

[19:27] These qualities will start popping up and to allow them to love us. we should naturally begin to treat other people better, to be more patient and more tolerant of our situation or our circumstances or other people's habits or quirks, right?

And so as that happens, other people will begin to notice that we are different somehow. And friends, that, that difference, that attraction, that, what people begin to see in us, that is our witness in many ways.

And the qualities that are manifest in us as connected disciples are qualities that others want to have in their own lives. they will want to know what it is that makes us different, what makes you different, and ultimately who makes us different.

And my friends, that can lead to the best fruit of all, new followers and new people and new believers in Jesus Christ. If someone came up to you tomorrow and said, hey, something is different about you, what is going on in your life?

not in a conflict sort of way, but in a genuine curiosity sort of way. How would you respond? Well, you may say something like, well, it's Jesus in me, or I have a relationship with Jesus and he has changed my life.

[21:03] Maybe that's another way you would approach it. And then they say, hopefully, that's interesting, tell me more about that. or how do I get what you have?

Do you see that? How would you respond there? Witness. Does the thought of that, does even that word, terrify you?

Is your automatic response, oh, I'm not good at that, I'll leave that to someone else. let's hear the words of 1 Peter 3, verse 15.

But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared, it says, to give an answer to everyone who asks you.

to give the reason for the hope that you have. It's a pretty clear direction, right? Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

[22 : 11] We're called to be prepared, not to seek to dodge the responsibility. Does that make sense? If someone asked you right now how to come to know Jesus, what would you do?

What would you say? Well, as I said earlier, I want our church to be a place where we make disciples who make disciples.

And so, the first step in a disciple journey should be an obvious one. It's for someone to come to know Jesus. You can't be a disciple of Jesus if you don't know him.

You can't follow Jesus if you've never met him. So, God has called me to be a pastor and particularly a pastor of this church at this time.

So, my main job is to teach God's word. It's to encourage God's people and equip them. And so, I want to prepare you for leading someone you love and trust to the Lord.

[23 : 20] and I want to help you be an effective witness for Jesus Christ. So, I've prepared a handout and I think you've all received a copy with some verses on it.

And you may have heard of this approach, this tool, process, as the Romans road. road. And so, this is one way to lead someone to Jesus, one way to explain the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

And you may have your own way of doing it. You may have an effective way that you've done that in the past and so don't worry about adopting something new if you have a process yourself.

but the Romans road is a process, is a way. And so, it's called that because it comes from the words of Paul in the book of Romans.

And so, this is definitely not the only way to introduce someone to Jesus. And as I said, you may already have an approach that works best for you and that's fine too.

[24 : 27] But let's walk through the Romans road together quickly and now you have this written down. So, Romans 1 verse 16 says, I am not ashamed of the gospel because salvation of everyone who believes.

So, the key message there is that God's salvation is available to everyone. Romans 2 verse 4 says, Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance?

what it's getting at there is that God loves you. God loves each of us and he wants us to turn to him. So, it's not to show contempt for what this message is but to turn to God because he loves you.

Romans 3 verse 23 says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. God. So, it reminds us that we've all sinned and missed God's standard.

So, guess what? You're a sinner too and so am I. But through the grace of God, through God's forgiveness, through Jesus' sacrifice, we are forgiven.

[25 : 44] So, you're in the same boat as the person you're sharing this with. Romans 5 verse 8 says, Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

And the point there is that God made a way for sinners through Jesus as I suggested. Romans 6 verse 23 says, For the wages of sin is what?

Death. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And as we've talked about before over the years, we get what we don't deserve.

Right? Through God's grace, we receive what we do not deserve. We receive forgiveness. The sacrifice of Jesus covers our sin and defeated sin and death.

So, we deserve death for our sins, but we have forgiveness and life through Jesus. Romans 10 verse 9 and 10 and then verse 13 says, If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[27 : 01] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. For, here's verse 13, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

So the message there is confess, confess our sin, confess that we need Jesus, and believe in who he is, believe in what he has done for salvation in him, for salvation in Jesus.

Romans 8 verse 1 says, Therefore, I love that good therefore in the Bible, therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Where, oh, death is your victory? Well, when we confess and we believe, as that previous step was, when we confess and believe in Jesus Christ, we're no longer condemned, we're covered by Jesus' sacrifice.

Romans 12 verse 1 and 2 says, Therefore, another good therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

[28 : 31] This is your spiritual act of worship. So we give ourselves to God out of love, out of gratitude, out of response for what he has done, and we let him transform our lives.

And our transformed lives become a witness to other people. So, friends, you have it printed there. That is the Romans Road.

It's a guide for you to lead someone into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. So, friends, tuck this away in your Bible, fold it up and put it in your purse or your wallet.

It's a great resource. If you're a phone note person like I am, transcribe it into your phone, memorize it if you want. Memorizing scripture is always a good thing.

My point here, my friends, is this. Don't be afraid to declare your faith and your love for Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid to step into an opportunity that God has given you to have a conversation with someone else that you know and you may have an existing relationship with.

[29 : 50] Don't turn your back on an opportunity when God is calling you. And you know what? Here's the reality too.

This is the amazing blessing of this. Just do what you know. It's not about, just like I've said with prayer, it's not about perfect words. It's about doing what you know.

Tell the story of how God has changed your life. And then trust that Jesus will do the rest because he will.

He's got it. He's just asking you to be a faithful disciple and witness. Amen? Amen. Amen.