

Discipleship Driven

Good morning Church, it is an honor to be up here in front of you today. Go ahead and open your bibles up to 1 Thessalonians, and we'll get there in just a few minutes. As we shared at the start of this series, our four goals over the next four years are to be a church that is marked by being **bible saturated, spirit-led, discipleship driven, and outward oriented**. I get to talk to you today about one of my very favorite things, discipleship. Now these four goals will take some time to work through as a church family together. Unless you'd like to stay here til midnight I won't have the time to tell you everything about discipleship that I'd like to. So today will be an intro to discipleship, and we will have plenty more coming your way over the next few years.

To be more specific in regards to discipleship driven, our goal is by 2028

We want every member of City Church to have at least two people they are persistently investing in (spiritually speaking), and at least one person persistently investing in them.

Now I fully realize that discipleship happens in many different contexts (peer to peer, during your lifegroup night, at work, through teaching in a format like this, the list goes on), but to be *even more* specific, this morning we are talking about an intentional relationship between one follower of Jesus and other followers of Jesus who aren't quite as far along in their walk with Christ. **I'm talking about a persistent practice of intentionally training and edifying specific people in your life to help them grow as disciples of Jesus.**

Think back to Kent's teaching a few weeks ago on Matthew 28: being a disciple is more like an apprentice learning a trade and less like a student at a university today. In the context that the scriptures were written, disciples would spend time with a mentor and not **just** go through good content together, they would live normal, everyday life intentionally with their mentor. They would learn what it means to know and follow God through watching, imitating, and doing. *This* is what the bible means when talking about discipleship. It is an active and intentional relationship for everyone involved. When I say discipleship in this teaching this is the kind of relationship I am referring to.

Now, You may look at that goal and say "wow, I only need to disciple two people? I can handle at least 20, I mean come on" (just a side note here Jesus had 12 disciples, and really invested heavily in 3 - do with that info whatever you want). Others of us see this goal and think, "wow two people?! Dude I'm just surviving in this whole following Jesus thing I can't imagine leading anyone else". And maybe for you, you aren't thinking about either of those things; You've never actually given discipleship any serious consideration.

Maybe you just don't know where to start, or you DO know where to start, but for one reason or another you haven't actually taken any meaningful steps to disciple others. Whatever your experience has been with discipleship, **My goal for this morning is for each one of us to walk out of this room with a hopeful and confident understanding that because you have God's Word and God's very Spirit alive within you, you have what it takes to go and make disciples. Yes, you. YOU have what it takes. In other words, the invitation to go and make disciples is not a practice reserved only for the spiritual giants or vocational ministers, it's possible for every follower of Jesus.**

We have talked a bit in this series about how we want to pursue each one of these four together, each of these goals are necessary to balance one another out. With Bible Saturated we talked about how if we don't know what the scriptures teach, we will find ourselves perpetually enslaved to whatever "sounds right" in the moment. Last week, we talked about how if we aren't Spirit-led, we're powerless. Now let's talk now about being discipleship driven.

We are going to read a letter from Paul to some of the people he disciplined, but first I want to show you some of Jesus's words on discipleship. Take a look with me up on the screen to the passage that Kent unpacked for us a few weeks ago. Matthew 28, starting in verse 18, this passage is commonly known as the great commission:

[18] Then Jesus came to them [that is His disciples] and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me[19] 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, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

See Paul didn't just make up the whole discipleship thing, and we aren't just making it up today. It's not just a church tradition or a neat way to do ministry. It is **a calling** on each one of Jesus's disciples. The call to go and make disciples comes straight from the mouth of Jesus to his disciples. I absolutely love these few verses because not only are they filled with purpose, they are filled with the assurance of God helping us along the way.

See throughout this passage - in the beginning, middle, and end is God - All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to **me[Jesus]**. **Therefore... [because of this!]** **[you]** go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of **the father** and of **the Son** and of **the Holy Spirit [not in your own name¹]**, and teaching them to obey

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:13

everything I [Jesus] have commanded you. And surely I [Jesus] am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Now, we mentioned at the start of this series how you can read and study the scriptures and still miss Jesus, and I think this is one of the verses where we can so easily do that. Let me show you what I mean. I would bet every dollar in my wallet, all six of them, that when we first put this passage up on the screen a few weeks ago, or maybe even just now when I read it to you, that a good many of you actually heard it more like this:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “Look how mighty I am and how great of a job I did in my ministry [well done Jesus must be nice to have all authority]. Now, [pause for effect] you have to go and make disciples of all nations, baptize them, fix them, train them to never make a mistake, just like I have commanded you. And surely I’ll be watching you always, to the very end of the age.”

Anybody hear it like that? ... Now we can look up here and laugh and call this absurd, but sit with this for a minute. Isn’t this actually how we tend to think about this passage? Now we might actually say things a little differently, but I would argue that the reasons we have for not pursuing discipleship aren’t all that different from my translation of Matthew 28. I think that if we are honest with ourselves, we’ll see this framework behind the reasons we give for not making disciples. Let me put words to a few of them:

- **“I don’t have time”** - Let me help you see something here: Time is a resource that we each have. We decide what things are important to us, and we spend our time on those things just like we spend dollar bills on amazon. We don’t often think of it this way, but we even use the same verb, to spend. When we decide that exercise is important, we wake up early to spend time going for a run or hitting the gym. When we decide to be more intentional with our spouse, we set aside time to spend date nights. When we decide that we need 8 hours of sleep, we tell our friends we won't be going out tonight, and we spend our time resting. The truth of the matter for this one, guys, is that we each have 24 hours in the day, and whether we want to admit it or not, it’s not that there **isn’t** time for discipleship. It’s just that we haven’t decided to **make time** for discipleship.

The other piece to this one is the Cory Ten Boom quote Marcus shared last week, “If Satan can’t make you sin, he’ll make you busy”. Such a powerful quote. What I want to say about it is this: there is a difference between *finding* time and *making* time. Finding time is when we put something into our calendar in the free slots. That is not really what I’m talking about. I don’t honestly believe that we have ample amounts of unallocated time slots laying around. What I am saying is that

when you devote time in your schedule to obedience to God, even when it costs you something, and especially when it's a *good* thing, God does amazing things in and through you.

I'll give you a freebie here, my guess is that if you were to look at this past week's screen time on your phone, you'd have a pretty good idea of where you could cut back to get back at least a few more hours of your time. I have a friend was reflecting on her screen time this week and had a terrible realization. You ready for this? She saw 3.5 hours of screen time per day and at first thought to herself "that's not half bad", but when she sat with it for a minute, she realized that adds up to 24 hours in a week. You know, a whole day.

Maybe for you the reason isn't time is more like this:

- "I don't know how to do it" "I wouldn't even know where to start, much less write a curriculum for someone else". Here's the truth of the matter: You have the Word, you have the Spirit. Peter puts it like this in one of his letters²: "[God's] divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness". God has given you everything you need to follow Him through His Word and His Spirit. If you currently are following Jesus, you have what it takes to help someone else follow Jesus. In reality, most of us don't need more content, and we don't need more knowledge to obey Jesus. What we need is a mentor who is also a friend. Someone to process with and learn from but also someone to obey Jesus alongside. We need someone to show us the way. Now, If you have not decided that you will follow Jesus as Lord, don't start discipling anyone, sort that one out before you seek to lead others.

Ok how about this one:

- "Someone else would do a better job" Can we please just stop with all the comparison? Scripture is abundantly clear on these three things: we are ultimately just vessels of God's mercy to each other³, that you are on this earth on purpose⁴, and that God wants to use you to bring His people close to Him⁵. You are not all that great, and also *you are not worthless*. If you have the Spirit of God within you,

² 2 Peter 1:3

³ 1 Corinthians 4:7

⁴ Psalm 139:13-18

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

you have everything you need! Not only that, but you are not alone; we will help one another along the way.

Here's another one:

- “I don't have the energy or capacity to lead someone else”
 - Maybe the reason why this is so hard for you is that you are afraid of how draining it could be. What I want to say about this one is that true discipleship is not only draining for one person and only life giving for the other. You are both pursuing Jesus together, and you both get life from the relationship.

Let me share with you one more metaphor that can bring some peace in this area. Before John Deere came along, agricultural work was done with the help of oxen. Two oxen would be tied to one another and to a tool to work the ground. The term for this is that they would be “yoked” together. The interesting thing with this is that when they would pair **two young** oxen together, they would tire out before their task was completed. When they would pair **two older**, seasoned oxen, they would not have enough energy to complete the task. So what they would do is pair a young, energetic ox with an older ox who has seen many seasons. When they paired them this way, the young ox would provide energy and enthusiasm and the old ox would teach him the pace of the labor so that he made it through the season. See where I'm going with this. Discipleship is helpful and life giving for everyone involved.

And Finally,

- “No one is discipling me”
 - Here's one of those “upside down” things about the kingdom: When you give your life away for others, you will find yourself taken care of by God. You have an opportunity here through the grace of God to give a gift that you have yet to receive. And what I have found in following Jesus is that when we serve others in the midst of our need, God heals our hearts as we obey Him. If each one of us took it upon ourselves to make disciples, we would all find that we are taken care of. More on this one in a bit.

The reality is that there are also good reasons for all of these things to come up. Discipleship does take time, it is hard work. It requires you to grow, it forces you to think about other people, it requires reliance on the Word and the Spirit of God, it is risky and

uncomfortable and you won't always, if ever, feel like a rockstar. It is all of things, **AND** it is always and undoubtedly worth it all to help other believers follow Jesus. It is worth it for us to take up the yoke of Jesus as he invites us to in Matthew 11⁶.

See, I'm convinced that some of our hesitation with discipleship may be due to small misunderstandings of what Jesus is telling us to do, and how he is telling us to do it. But it may also be that we haven't fully grasped the incredible privilege and responsibility that discipleship truly is.

Let's look at 1st Thessalonians. Now this book of the bible is a letter that Paul and two of the guys he is discipling are writing to the church in Thessaloniki. Acts 17 tells us that Paul and Silas had only spent a very short amount of time there (scholars believe this to be no more than three months). In those three months Paul and Silas spent time discipling the Thessalonians to start a church there. Paul and Silas were then run out of town, and this letter is coming in to the Thessalonians about a year later. Verses 4-7 of chapter 1 sum up their time together like this,

4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

Here we see our 4 goals for the next four years at work. First, Paul and his disciples go to Thessaloniki - **Outward Oriented**. Then they spend time sharing the gospel - **Bible Saturated**, not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit - **Spirit Led**. They lived among the Thessalonians and encouraged them to imitate them as they pursued God - **discipleship driven**. And the Thessalonians have continued in all these things to become a model church to believers in the region.

And a little further down the page, Paul gives us two metaphors that I think are incredibly helpful for how we think about that discipleship specifically. Skip ahead with me to chapter 2 starting in verse 7,

...Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

⁶ Matthew 11:29-30

Let me read that again.

...Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. 9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Not only was Paul well aware of Jesus in his discipleship to the Thessalonians. He focused on something else we tend to miss. Did you notice the familial language threaded throughout the passage? Paul is clearly not thinking of discipleship as a student/teacher relationship but rather as a mother/daughter and father/son relationship.

Think about the relationship that a mother has with her newborn child. A mother nurtures and cares for her child as if they were her own body. She doesn't just set the newborn down on the ground and say, "bathrooms over there and the fridge is that way, figure it out kid, good luck". A mother takes care of her children, and even more than that, she sacrifices their body to love and take care of them. She will wake up every hour in the night to feed them. She will think about her baby always with compassion and affection. A mother doesn't ignore her baby's cries, and she doesn't leave her baby to fend for herself. A mother's heart for her baby is unlike anything else. Just a side note to all the fellas in the room, next Sunday is Mother's Day, write that down.

And in verse 11 Paul says that he dealt with the Thessalonians as a father deals with his own children. These kinds of relationships are just precious. I would do ANYTHING for my kids. I am constantly thinking about them. I pray for them. I want them to thrive and succeed and to be themselves. I want Selah to try sports and try making music and find what makes her come alive. I want to cheer for Ellie when she tries something new, I want to hold her in my arms when she is hurting. I want them to live a confident, helpful, and loving life. I want them to know Jesus deeply and intimately. I want them to hear God and obey the Spirit. I want them to be Bible Saturated, grounded in the Word. I want them to run free, and I also have grace for them when they're learning to walk. I want to give them gifts, I want to teach them lessons, and sometimes I just want to be silent and let them figure something out on their own.

Mother/daughter, father/son, These are intense metaphors to describe a discipleship relationship, are they not? That's an intense level of responsibility and involvement between followers of Jesus. That's a little different than just "yeah I'll show up at LifeGroup and do my best to answer their questions if they ask them." There's a level of spiritual responsibility taken for the people you're discipling. When Mary Cate and I lead our girls, it's hard, it's messy, and we aren't perfect parents. But we see where our girls are at and we know where they one day will be and we work to prepare them for life and encourage them to follow Jesus with all they have in them. We love them, sacrifice for them, and care for them even when it's hard and even when they are being little stinkers.

See, Paul didn't miss Jesus in his reading of the great commission, and he didn't miss the Thessalonians either. He really did see them as brothers and sisters, as sons and daughters. And he loved and treated them like his own flesh and blood. **This is** how we are to think about the ones we are discipling.

Now I'm not saying we take responsibility **instead of** them, but we do take this responsibility in addition to them having their own faithful pursuit of Jesus. Look with me at verse 13 and we'll see this from Paul,

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews

Here Paul is further amazed with the faith of the Thessalonians. They understood that it was really God at work in their lives. The point of this entire letter is not Paul tooting his own horn. He is marveling at **their** faith and obedience to Jesus. In verses 13 and 14 he is saying thank you for listening to us, but even more than that he is praising God that the thessalonians are genuinely following Jesus.

If you've ever had someone disciple you in this kind of way, you know how powerful it can be. If you haven't had that kind of relationship but you long for it, you also have a decent idea of how powerful it could be. So what I'm saying is, in light of that, let's do this for one another.

You might be thinking, but that's the thing: I haven't had somebody do it for me, which is why I know I don't know how to do it. And I have two more responses to that.

One: you have had someone do it for you. As we mentioned last week, if you're a follower of Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit within you. The Holy Spirit is constantly teaching, training, convicting, and leading. And as we talked about two weeks ago, you have the Scriptures, which is all about who God is and what he wants for us. So you actually do have plenty of resources for discipleship, even if you've never had a flesh-and-blood person discipling you.

The second thing is this: I am going to give you a few tools...

Again, these goals we are speaking about in this series are four goals over the next four years. I'm going to talk about just a few key concepts today, and we will flesh each piece over time. The first is a tool for how I'd encourage you to spend your time together when you meet up in a discipleship relationship.

UP - IN - OUT

- **Up** - Focus on their relationship with God. How are they doing at pursuing Jesus faithfully? Here are a few helpful questions for you to ask when you spend time together:
 - What is God teaching you?
 - How are you making space to spend time with Him?
 - What has he revealed to you that you need to obey?
- **In** - Focus on their relationships with other followers of Jesus. How are they doing at serving your community and making disciples? Here are a few questions you could ask:
 - How are your relationships with others (family, LifeGroup, etc)?
 - How are you investing in them?
 - What are you praying about for them?
- **Out** - Focus on their relationships with people in their life who don't know Jesus. How are they engaging outsiders purposefully? Here are a few questions you could ask:
 - Who are the people in your life that don't know God?
 - Are you intentionally reaching out to them?
 - How are you making space for them to encounter God?

In all of these things it's important to realize that as humans we go through seasons. There may be seasons where it is important that you put some extra emphasis on one of these areas. Feel free to lean into any one of these areas with the person you're discipling, but not to the exclusion of the others. It may be helpful for you to go through a

resource or a book together when you feel stuck. We will definitely be bringing in more tools and resources for you as we move along, but up-in-out should be enough to get you started in making disciples.

The second piece I want to equip you with this morning is who and how to ask. When thinking through **who to ask** to disciple start here:

- **Ask God** - The first thing you need to do is make space for God to highlight someone for you to disciple. The Spirit speaks to us far more than anyone realizes, and He always, always knows best. We will talk plenty more about the Spirit in our next series, which is called More of the Holy Spirit. Start by asking God.
- **Model following Jesus to everyone, invite the hungry** - Put following Jesus on display to everyone, and invite those who show interest. Now when I say “put following Jesus on display”, what I’m not saying here is for you to make a big show out of everything. I’m not telling you to show off or make sure your LifeGroup knows you didn’t miss your quiet time. What I am encouraging you to do is follow Jesus alongside the other followers of Jesus in your life. This could look like asking someone in your LifeGroup to take communion with you and talk them through your process, it could look like asking them if you could pray over them, or it could look like asking them to serve or volunteer somewhere with you. Give them a glimpse into your walk with God. Show them how you follow Jesus, and if you sense that they may be intrigued to find out more, ask them if you can disciple them. More on that in just a moment.
 - I want to pause for a moment and talk about something here. Sometimes it’s not about finding new people to disciple. It’s about discipling the ones you have been given. Parents, teachers, supervisors, coaches... You have been entrusted with stewardship over God’s children, and your care for them is every bit as important as other followers of Jesus that we disciple. Do not be tempted to neglect those who are under your care in the name of finding others to disciple.
- Now as for who to ask to disciple you the steps are very similar:
 - First pray and ask God to prompt you to ask someone
 - Next ask a follower of Jesus who looks and sounds like Jesus. It could be someone who is being a faithful follower a season or two or ten ahead of you, or it could be someone younger than you. Who in your life looks and sounds like Jesus? Ask them to disciple you.

Ok we have talked a bit about who to ask, now let’s talk about **how to ask**:

- First off **Be clear** - Say what you mean and mean what you say. “I would like to disciple you and help you follow Jesus. Would you be interested in learning how I do that practically and in following Jesus together?”
- **Commit to a length of time.** - You shouldn't be asking this person to imitate you forever. There's a good chance you won't be close for the rest of your lives, so start off with a clear expectation. Maybe something like, “would you be willing to meet up every other week for the next three months? We can have another conversation then, and if this has been helpful in your walk with Jesus, we could keep meeting together”.

The last thing I want to share with you on this as we wrap up are a few things you should expect from a discipleship relationship:

- Expect to be offended. They may say no, that is okay. Jesus got rejected quite a bit. Trust that God will bring you the right people to disciple or the right person to disciple you at the right time. And don't give up the first time someone tells you no.
- You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink. Sometimes you will tell them exactly what they need to hear in exactly the right way and at exactly the right time, and they will still refuse to listen. Don't we do the same thing with Jesus? Expect to grow in your empathy for Jesus as a disciple maker, and also, you expect to grow in your compassion for people.
- Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for the rest of his life. All the wisdom and little nuggets of gold pale in comparison to the impact you could have by teaching those you disciple how to take everything to Jesus. Don't focus on presenting solutions, focus on teaching them to obey Jesus.
- You won't have all the answers. Get used to saying “I don't know, let's find out together”. Search the scriptures. Pray and seek God together. I'd much rather you say “I don't know, let's go to God” then just try and give people your best guess.
- You don't have to be perfect, just faithful. You have what it takes to go and make disciples.

In all of this, stay connected to God through His Word and through His Spirit. He is our truth, He is our strength, He is Immanuel, God with us. And he will be *with you* as you try and help others follow him. As we go to the tables together as followers of Jesus, we celebrate His sacrifice for us. That God made Him who had no sin, to be sin, that we might become the righteousness of God.⁷ Let's be attentive to the Spirit this morning. What might God be wanting to say to you at this moment? Maybe He wants to show you someone you are to invest in, maybe He wants to deal with something deep in your

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:21

heart, maybe He wants to pull you in and draw you close, and tell you He loves you. Whatever it is, the Spirit is in this place, and He is longing to connect with you. Our prayer team will be up front up in the balcony and on either side of the stage this morning. They would love nothing more than to pray over you and pray with you about anything going on in your life. Whatever you need to do, please don't leave this place without responding to God. Let me pray for us this morning as we respond.

Father God, we thank you for your goodness to us this morning. We thank you for your Son, Jesus, who was punished for us and who died and rose to make us right with you. Thank you for your presence, Holy Spirit. Thank you God that you are immanuel, God with us. I ask God that you would fill us with boldness, compassion, and humility as we seek to love your children and lead them to you. I pray that you fill each of us with your Spirit this morning. And teach us all to obey you more. We love you God. In Jesus name, Amen.