

Fingerprint - Discipleship

November 3, 2013

On an April morning in 1994, an airplane carrying the president of Rwanda crashed in the African desert. Foul play was suspected. Reprisals between tribal parties with historic animosity began. Nobody could imagine where it would lead.

At that time, Rwanda was considered the most Christian country in Africa with more than 90 percent of the population claiming church affiliation. For years Rwanda was a case study for the success of Christian missions. Rwanda was even called a “Christian kingdom” because so many members of the government attended church. As that fateful day in April 1994 revealed, something was wrong, deeply wrong with Rwandan Christianity.

Rwanda is composed of two tribes, the Tutsis and the Hutus. Suspecting foul play in the president’s death, members of one tribe retaliated against the other. The violence returned. As violence often does, it began to escalate. Soon members of the army, vigilantes and ordinary citizens were hunting down members of ethnic tribes different than their own for slaughter. In the next 100 days the people of Rwanda butchered one another; 800,000 people died in only 100 days as the Rwandans destroyed one another. Lacking ammunition, many were hacked to death with machetes. How can this happen in a country where 90 percent of the people are in church on Sunday morning? This morning, we will find the answer.¹

¹ Camp, L. (2008). Mere discipleship: radical christianity in a rebellious world. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors of Faith Church. We are in a series called, "Fingerprint: What makes Faith Church unique?" In this series, we are looking at the seven core values of Faith Church that make us unique in our community. These are values we want to reinforce on the Spirit Lake campus and replicate on the Spencer campus. Each of our core values are based off one word and a description that goes with it. This morning we are studying our fifth core value.

Discipleship — We believe God called us to be disciples and make disciples.

As we unpack what this mean, we will develop our thoughts around four questions. First, what is a disciple? Second, what does the Bible teach us about living as a disciple? Third, what does the Bible teach us about making disciples? Fourth, how do we apply this to our lives?

What is a disciple?

At church, you often hear me, or others, calling you to repent of your sin to God and cling to the forgiveness that is offered to each of us through Jesus Christ on the cross. I challenge you to become a Christian. How hard could that be? It is simply receiving a free gift from God offered us through Jesus. While it is the easiest thing in the world, that is only part of the story. The Bible tells us that with our trust in Christ, God also asks us to give our allegiance to Christ.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 (NIV)

We read that but it doesn't sink in what it means. What does it mean to declare Jesus as our Lord? A lord in the Bible is someone who is your master. He is your boss. He is your superior. You serve at the pleasure of your Lord.

The Christian life is not just about repenting of our sins and trusting Christ's death on the cross for forgiveness of our sins, but if we have truly trusted Jesus the proper response to the one who saved our lives is to let him become the boss of our lives.

Another term that describes the kind of relationship Christians are to have with God is the term disciple. In the ancient world, a disciple was an apprentice of a teacher. They lived with their teachers. They saw their teachers in glad times and sad times. They were not just a bunch of college buddies that hung out to drink and watch football games. Disciples were intentionally trying to imitate their teachers. Their goal in life was to become just like their teachers.

The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. Luke 6:40 (NIV)

As Christians, the Bible doesn't just offer us Christ as our savior, but he deserves to be our Lord for saving us. As Christians, we are called to be disciples and to give our lives to becoming more like our teacher, Jesus.

Today, we have separated being saved by Christ from being a disciple of Christ. They are very different but they can't be separated.

Salvation costs you nothing; discipleship costs you everything. Salvation happens in a moment; discipleship takes a lifetime. Salvation is something God does for you. Discipleship is something you do with God. All true Christians are disciples. The Christian life is the striving to become a better disciple of Christ over time.

What does the Bible teach us about living as a disciple?

Living as a disciple will cost you.

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Luke 14:25–33 (NIV)

These are strange verses. Jesus begins by telling us we need to hate our own father, mother, wife and children if we are going to be his disciples. I thought one of the Ten Commandments was to honor your father and mother. Doesn’t Ephesians talk about husbands loving their wives like Christ loved the church? Where was Jesus heading with this? Why would he tell those who love him to hate their own families and even their own lives?

In Judaism, one of the grammatically acceptable ways to make a point is to use language of exaggeration. We do it today. We say, “I am so hungry I could eat an elephant.” “I am so tired I could sleep for a week.” In these verses, Jesus uses that kind of language. “If you are my disciple, you need to place your love for me so far above your love for others that your love for those closest to you is to be like hatred in comparison to your love for me.” Jesus didn’t tell us to hate our families. He said that to be his disciple costs us. It may cost us loving Christ above our own families.

If you think about it, this makes sense. I occasionally counsel couples that are dating. The young couple ends up in my office because they are looking for a church wedding but neither of them know a thing about Christ. Let's say I present the gospel to both of them and the girl becomes a Christian but her fiancé doesn't trust in Christ. What do most ladies do in that instance? It is called missionary dating. If he doesn't trust in Christ, you can just see the anguish on the girl's face. "Jesus, you wouldn't call me to give up the boy I love? We want to get married. He is amazing. I just have to make this relationship work." If he doesn't repent and trust in Christ, what is Jesus calling her to do? Break it off. "You have to love me more than even those closest to you."

In some parts of the world, especially in hard-core Muslim countries, to become a Christian means you are shunned by your family. They even conduct your mock funeral because, to them, you are as good as dead when you become a Christian. Sometimes Christians are hunted down and killed by their own family members for following Christ. A disciple of Christ is called to count the cost. If you are my disciple, realize you may have to love me more than even those you love most.

Jesus says that whoever does not carry his own cross cannot be my disciple. What does that mean? Today, wearing a cross is fashionable. They come gold-plated and diamond-studded. What does Jesus mean when he tells us to carry our cross? If you wore a cross around your neck in the first century you would be considered a sadist. The cross was a instrument of torture and death. When a condemned man was sentenced to die, he was made to carry his

own cross through the streets on his way to his own execution. In that culture, if you saw someone carrying a cross to his execution, you were invited, even encouraged, to mock them, to spit on them. You picked up dirt and threw a handful in his face. In first century culture, you said and did the most hurtful and disrespectful things you could to someone carrying his cross. After all, he deserved to die a hideous death. Jesus told us that if we want to follow him as a disciple and become more like him, we need to be prepared to carry our crosses. We need to expect at times to be publicly hated and humiliated because we are living like Jesus.

Jesus said discipleship is like a building project. Before you build a building, you need a budget. You make sure you have the money you need from the bank or in savings. You look like a fool when you lay a foundation, put up framing but run out of cash. Now you don't have a building, you have a monument to your stupidity that is good for nothing other than showing others you didn't think through what it would cost you.

It is like a king with 10,000 soldiers not thinking about waging war against another king with 20,000. You have to count the cost before you move on that one. Going to war when you are vastly outnumbered is called suicide.

Jesus tells us that living as a disciple will cost us. We need to be prepared for that. The more we become like Christ, the more we should expect to be ridiculed like Christ.

Living as a disciple will not be convenient.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air

have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:57–62 (ESV)

Here we have what sound like unreasonable demands. People were willing to follow Jesus but the timing just didn’t mesh with their lives. We have one guy whose father apparently just died and, to honor his father, he wanted to attend the funeral. That sounds reasonable. When you do a little research, you discover that the term *bury my father* is actually an idiom. It means to take care of your father until his death. This guy was saying he was ready to be a disciple of Christ but he wouldn’t begin until his parents passed away. That is when it was convenient for him. It fit into his schedule. Jesus said that is not what a disciple looks like. Disciples don’t fit Christ into their schedules, they fit their schedules around Christ.

I hear this all the time from people who claim to be Christians but they don’t think it is important to count the costs of being a disciple. “I can’t go to church right now. My life is too busy. I will come back to church when this season in my life slows down.” “I can’t read my Bible right now. I am too busy at work. When I get home from work I just need to play video games to unwind.” “Don’t sign me up to be an usher or a greeter. I am traveling too much right now. It isn’t convenient for me.” Discipleship means by definition we are willing to be inconvenienced to follow Christ.

Another guy said he would follow Jesus but first he wanted to go back and say good bye to his family. That sounds like another reasonable request. Who wouldn't want to kiss his wife and kids good bye? If I don't get a kiss from my wife in the morning I have to drive home and get one over lunch. This doesn't sound unreasonable. As you study this expression, you find it is also an idiom that means *making sure your family is cared for*. This guy was saying he would be ready to follow Christ but he wanted to make \$3million dollars first so his family could live off the interest. You can just see this guy rationalizing. "Think about how much more time I can give on the mission field when I don't have to raise support." What is the problem? He was putting financial comfort for himself and his family in front of living as a disciple of Jesus.

As Christians, we are called to be disciples of Christ. Disciples of Christ are called to love Christ above even their families. Disciples of Christ honor Christ above their schedules and above their plans. A disciple of Christ is someone who is striving to put Christ first in all things.

This morning, discipleship may be a new revelation for you. Maybe you are here thinking you trusted Christ in a prayer and you are good to go because God saved you. God saved you but he wants, and deserves, all of you. He calls you to live as a disciple. That means we live our lives striving to think and act more like Jesus. When we do that, it will be costly and inconvenient.

Are any of us perfect disciples? Of course not! We are always repenting. We are running to the cross for forgiveness. We are striving to be a church not

just of Christians but a church of disciples of Christ who live, think and act, just like Christ, which will many times be costly and inconvenient.

Where do I find the strength to live as a disciple?

This week, as I researched, I struggled with some of the books I read. I kept finding people who told me to try harder to be a disciple, work longer, grit my teeth and exert more effort. At first blush, that is what discipleship sounds like. It sounds like it is a drill sergeant trying to remaking you. To be quite honest, that leaves me with an erie hopelessness.

In my experience, the strength to live as a disciple doesn't come from a book written by a drill sergeant telling me to try harder, it comes from reading the Bible and understanding how much Christ loves me. The more I discover about my sin and the more I learn about how much God saves me from it in Christ and all God has for me in Christ, the more I want to live as a disciple. I want to become just like my teacher, even if it is costly and inconvenient.

We will study much more of this in January when we get to the book of Ephesians where we learn the power to follow Christ is understanding who you are in Christ. If you are looking for strength to beat temptation it doesn't come from trying harder, it comes from enjoying Jesus more.

What do I gain by living as a passionate disciple?

Fruitfulness.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. John 15:4 (ESV)

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:8 (ESV)

Each one of us is headed either for a pine box or a metal urn. We will either be buried or burned. What do we leave behind? The size of our house doesn't matter. The length of our boat is something nobody cares about. All that will matter for eternity is how fruitful our lives were for Christ while on Earth. *The closer our discipleship of Christ, the bigger the impact we will leave for Christ.* There is a direct correlation between the two. When we are abiding in Christ we can't help but be fruitful for Jesus in this world.

What does the Bible teach about making disciples?

Just as important as being a disciple is making disciples.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

When we think of making disciples, we think that is the job of professionals. That is what a Billy Graham crusade is for. That is the job of the pastors and the elders. They are to make disciples. The problem is the job of every disciple is to make disciples. In fact, if we aren't making disciples, we aren't living as a disciple. The job of every Christian is to build other Christians up in their walks and to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world around them.

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19 (ESV)

Acts 17:26 tells us God determined exactly where we would live and when we would live. If you live in Spirit Lake, Spencer, Jackson, Lakefield, Estherville or Ocheyedan , it is not a mistake. It was sovereignly determined by God. He put us where he wants us to make disciples around us. The people in our lives are not there by accident. They are the ones God wants us to disciple.

How do I disciple those who are around me?

All of us are to make disciples of Christ and we are to encourage one another in our following Christ and loving him above all things. How should we make disciples?

In our culture, it is socially acceptable to invite friends to church. That introduces people to Jesus, but that doesn't always help disciple them. We have Faith University classes. They are a great opportunity for people to learn more about the Bible and the Christian faith. We have Life Groups. Life Groups are small church families that do life together, pray for one another, encourage one another and they are the primary source of care when it comes to hospital visits and caring.

I want to be honest about one thing I have felt. Something is missing. All of us are to make disciples. When Jesus made disciples, he did it by spending 24 hours a day with his disciples for almost three years. We are missing a lot of that closeness.



What would happen if we took discipleship individually?

What would happen if we found someone spiritually younger than

ourselves and began meeting with them every week or two to study the Bible together and share about life? Maybe you will take a book of the

Bible and study it together a chapter at a time. Another option is to take a great discipleship book like Multiply by Francis Chan

and David Platt or Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know by Wayne and Elliott Grudem and



commit to do breakfast and study together. Commit to a meeting schedule that has a beginning and an end date and lasts approximately six months. In that time, study the Bible together and pray for one another. Encourage one another in following Christ. When you have questions, that is good. Work on answering them during the week or ask the pastoral staff for help.

At the end of six months, the one who did the discipling and the one who was discipled are to find someone new and start the process all over again.

Could you imagine how God would use that? I picture fathers sitting down discipling their sons. Mothers sitting down discipling their daughters. I see high school seniors discipling underclassmen. I see young men learning from mature men. That is living the Faith Church mission of being a disciple and making disciples.

I have excuses.

I can imagine what some of you are thinking. Excuses. We have excuses.

I don't feel called to do this. Discipleship is not something only some are called to, it is something *all* are called to. This is not public teaching. This is

studying the Bible together one on one. Everybody is called to make disciples. God promises to make us fishers of men.

I have too much on my plate right now. This is true. Most of us have too much on our plates. We will always have too much on our plates. Discipleship is not something that just happens, it needs to be planned and chosen. Like Jesus talked about in Luke 9, discipleship has to be chosen. It doesn't just fit in. It is never the right time. It is a choice to be busy or to be fruitful. Discipleship is guaranteeing your time is fruitfully spent.

I don't know enough. I am a new Christian. I don't know how I would lead somebody as a disciple. The best way to grow is to teach. The discipleship books I suggested drive themselves. All you need to use them is a heartbeat. In addition, Pastor Dave is assembling a list of additional books that will fit different types of people, from new Christians to leadership development.

In Rwanda, most Christians trusted in Christ to forgive their sins, but they didn't realize Jesus was asking them to be his disciples and to become like him with their lives. The Rwandan people saw themselves as Hutus or Tutsis before they saw themselves as Christians. They weren't prepared to love Christ above all things, even their tribal identities.

While America is not composed of Hutus and Tutsis, we struggle with the same things. We want to be saved by Christ, but we don't want to live our lives as disciples of Christ when it is costly or inconvenient.

At Faith Church, we want to be different. We don't want to just be a church of people saved by Jesus, but we want to be Christians who are living as

disciples of Jesus and making disciples of Jesus, even when it is costly and inconvenient.

Discipleship — We believe God called us to be disciples and make disciples.



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