



DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

SERIES: PBCC FAMILY VALUES

Matthew 28:16–20

4th Message

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Good morning! Today, we come to our fourth and final PBCC family value. And just to re-iterate, these aren't the only values here at PBCC, but these four are primary values at our church that drive the things we do here and how we do them. Ultimately, we want to know Jesus and make him known. Our faith is not a system of principles or ideas or a philosophy. Rather, it centers on a person, namely Jesus of Nazareth. So, in what areas do we think his Holy Spirit has equipped us best, as a church in Cupertino to know him and make him known? These four values that we have covered these last few weeks have answered that question.

- The first value, taught by Brian, is life in the Spirit. Ultimately, the Spirit is who connects us to Jesus, enables us to know him, and empowers us to make him known.
- The second value, taught by John, is devotion to the Word. This means devotion to both Christ as the Word, and devotion to the revealed word of Scripture.
- The third value, taught by Joel last week, is participating in God's work. We are never called to participate for God. We are always called to participate with him in what He is doing in the world.
- Today we get the fourth family value at PBCC, discipleship through relationships.

Discipleship Introduction

What do we mean by discipleship through relationships? Let's begin with discipleship, and specifically this word, disciple. First of all, this is a word that we do not need to be afraid of. I've met people who are afraid of this word. This is not a word to be afraid of. This word is not just for super-Christians, the super spiros and the elite ones. This word is for all followers of Jesus. Simply put, disciple means follower, apprentice, learner/learner.

The fact is that every human being that has ever lived has followed someone or something. We all follow someone or something. The question is never, will I follow? The question is always, who or what will I follow? Every person on this planet is an apprentice of someone or something. So, the question is never, will I be an apprentice? The question is always, who am I studying? Who am I learning from? So, the question is never, ever will I be a disciple? The question is always, whose disciple will I be?

Jesus says, come follow me. Come be my disciple. Come be my apprentice. And, given who Jesus is and what he has done and will do, when he invites us into discipleship, he is granting us an incredible privilege. It's an incredible privilege. *Disciple of Jesus!* It doesn't get any better than that. What an incredible privilege!

A more complete definition of a Christian disciple might be this: one who is an apprentice of Jesus, and who participates in spiritual and relational growth within a safe and affirming group of like-minded disciples.

That might be a mouthful, but it helps explain that discipleship happens through relationships. "To be in Christ is to be related with everyone else who is in Christ."¹ This is why all the ministries at PBCC aim to base themselves on authentic relationships. We aim to not simply do programs in order to check boxes. We aim to build relationships in everything we do. We serve a God who lives in perfect relationship, and, being made in his image, we are designed to 'live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28) within authentic relationships. By participating in these relationships in conjunction with the participation of the Holy Spirit, real life-change (that isn't temporary) happens. Transformation happens. Only life-on-life can provide the necessary ingredients to enact real change, because it is through authentic relationships that we earn the right to speak into another life. Relationships change us much more than we think. In fact, as one writer says, relationships most certainly change us more than sermons do.

While discipleship can look different in different contexts, relationship is always the constant. For example:

- **Parent-child:** Parents you are the primary disciplers of your children. Don't outsource that to the church. It looks different for every family, but through the relationships, you are helping your children follow Jesus.
- **Growth groups/men's/women's studies:** Every group looks different, but through the relationships, each person helps the other follow Jesus.
- **Parachurch groups such as Moms in Prayer:** Through the relationships and prayer, each person is helping the others follow Jesus.
- **I work with college students.** I joke that's it's one of the worst jobs in the church because they always leave me. I only see them 4 months a year. I still consider our relationship a discipling relationship. I offer my help in following Jesus.

Discipleship looks different in different contexts, but relationships are the key.

The Great Commission

A. Make

Here at PBCC, we aim to be an intentional disciple-making church. Why? Because this is Jesus' agenda for his church, to make disciples. He is the head of the church, and his agenda for his church is making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples. This is his strategy for transforming the world. He really means for us to live in the real world as his followers. And, he really means for us to live in the real world helping others live as his followers.

Our primary text today is *The Great Commission* at the end of Matthew. These are sometimes considered the theme verses of the entire Gospel of Matthew. After his resurrection Jesus says, "Go and make disciples of all nations." (Matt 28:19) The only command

in that statement, as I've said before, is to make disciples (of the nations). Well, that's a bit overwhelming right? Help the nations live as his followers. Does He really mean this? Jesus, do you really mean this? I mean seriously. The answer is yes; this is his strategy for transforming the nations, for transforming the world. He really means for us to help others follow him with their lives in the real world.

For example, I recently ran across an article from Time magazine. It's from a few years ago and was titled, *10 Ideas That Make a Difference*. The article "explores innovations that are changing the way we work, live, pray and play." Some of the 10 ideas are as simple as shrinking your living space or riding your bike. Some have to do with new technologies like growing burgers in a laboratory, or wearing a computer which will automatically send your vitals to your doctor, thereby eliminating doctor visits. Now, I'm not sure how the doctor will have time to review and respond to all the data he or she gets, but I guess that might work. But, the most amazing one for me was titled, *Preach Like Your Faith Depends on It*. In the article, the writer makes the argument that the Gospel message should not be softened in order to make it more marketable to an America skeptical of institutions; rather, the faithful need a renewed commitment to **The Great Commission**. This person writes, "The Gospel has to be boldly proposed and radically embodied if the church is to grow and the wounds of a culture of self-absorption are going to be healed." This is in Time magazine. He continues, "In an age of fragmentation, the Gospel message could again offer the sort of unity of culture and vision that once existed." He then quotes G.K. Chesterton, who said, "the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried." And the last line of the article says this, "Putting traditional Christianity back into clinical trial in the culture is precisely what is needed."²

This is precisely what is needed. The church, our church, must be unapologetic about its message and must begin living the Gospel in our culture. This is what discipleship is all about, living in the real world as followers of Jesus and then helping others do it as well. Dallas Willard said it this way:

"Multitudes are now turning to Christ in all parts of the world. How unbearably tragic it would be, though, if the millions in Asia, South America and Africa were led to believe that the best they can hope for from the Way of Christ is the level of Christianity visible in Europe and America today, a level that has left us tottering on the edge of destruction. The world can no longer be left to mere diplomats, [mere] politicians, and [mere] business leaders. They have done the best they could, no doubt. But this is an age for spiritual heroes – a time for men and women to be heroic in faith and in spiritual character and power. The greatest danger to the Christian church today is that of pitching its message too low."³

Jesus says, "Go and make disciples." This is his strategy for transforming the world. The word make implies that disciples do not just happen. You have to make them. It implies intentionality, choosing to be about the kinds of activities that actually help one to follow Jesus and help others to follow Jesus.

B. Maturity

Whereas Jesus likes the word, make, Paul likes the word, mature. In our Scripture reading today in Ephesians 4, from the Message, he encourages his readers to use their gifts "12 to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church,

13 until we're ... fully mature adults ... fully alive like Christ" (Eph 4:11–16). In the Greek, the word mature is the word *telos*. *Telos* means the inherent destiny of something. The goal of something or the completion of something. Paul in that passage is saying that Jesus, the head of the church, gives gifts to enable the church to make maturing disciples of him, helping grow the church into its inherent destiny, the very maturity of Jesus himself. The key is that we will always be maturing. We will always be an apprentice, a student. We will never graduate from the Jesus school.

The image of course which I like to use, from the Sermon on the Mount, is getting turned right-side up as we mature. As we continue to be Jesus' apprentices and followers, we slowly get turned right-side up, looking more and more like him every day.

The Great Claim

So, what is the nature of this discipleship, this growing up into Christ? There is so much that could be said here, and we don't have time to say it all, but it all begins with the Great Claim.

Before we get the Great Commission in Matthew, Jesus makes the Great Claim: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18). All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Before he calls us to make disciples, he makes this great declaration. Especially in our culture, it is an audacious claim. If this is not true, then Jesus is a lunatic, as CS Lewis' says, and no one should follow him. But, if this is true, then everyone should follow him. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. It means there is not a realm of life anywhere in the universe over which Jesus Christ is not Lord. It is foundational as disciples of Jesus that we embrace this great claim. That little word, "all," radically alters our view of life. For it means that there is not a single part of each of our lives in which Jesus is not Lord. Jesus is Lord of all, he has all authority over all of our lives.

Abraham Kuyper said it this way, "There is not one centimeter of human existence to which Christ who is Lord of all does not point and say that is mine."⁴

It is a comprehensive claim. Being a disciple of Jesus means continually learning how to embrace this claim with my life, and helping others embrace this claim. Let me try to illustrate.

Let's imagine that our lives are made up of many boxes. Each box represents a different area of our life. So, some boxes might be: home, work, school, hobbies, church activities, civic activities, or, for me, a big sports box. Some boxes are bigger than others, as you can see. But Jesus is Lord of every box of our life and discipleship is learning how to embrace that claim.

Leslie Newbigin, the famous missionary to India in the 20th Century, said, "fragmentation is the single greatest challenge to discipleship in our time."⁵ And, I think he's right. In our fragmented society, it is easy to make Jesus Lord of one or two of these boxes—maybe the church activities box or home box. It's easy to give Jesus authority over one or two of these boxes, but not all of them.

The journey of discipleship is the journey of learning how to make Jesus Lord over all of the boxes, to give Jesus authority over every part of our lives.

The Great Promise

Now, I don't know about you, but this seems a bit overwhelming. This is massive isn't it? It's definitely a thrill and a privilege and an

adventure being invited to be a disciple of Jesus, but it can feel a bit overwhelming. It encompasses all the nations, demands all of my life, and means helping others with the same journey. But we don't want to be afraid of this word disciple. So, let me give you the good news from our text. Jesus gives us the Great Claim, followed by the Great Commission, but then he gives us the great news, which is the Great Promise.

“And surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Here is the good news! He is with us! God the Spirit is in us, and you can't get closer than in! The Holy Spirit is the ultimate key to discipleship, because the Spirit is the great discipler. In the final analysis, the Holy Spirit is the one who makes maturing disciples. We grow into maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This should lift a huge burden right off of your shoulders! The responsibility is not ours! We are not responsible for other people's faith. The responsibility falls on the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be intentional with participating with the Spirit. But it does mean that the Christian life is a life lived in radical dependence on the Spirit. To live a life of discipleship is to learn how to lean into the Spirit, to trust in the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit, helping others to do the same, while we are also being helped by others. So, in reality, to enter into discipleship is to participate with the Spirit as he matures us into Christ-likeness.

So, what is a disciple? One who is an apprentice of Jesus, and who participates with the Spirit in spiritual and relational growth within a safe and affirming group of like-minded disciples.

Intentional Activities for Discipleship

How can we be intentional about maturing in our faith, and how can we help others do the same? Here are seven intentional activities for discipleship:

1. **Discipleship involves learning to live life in the Spirit.** The Christian life is a life lived in radical dependence on the Spirit.
2. **Discipleship involves being devoted to the Word,** soaking in the Word continually. I know how busy each of us is, but the Word is the place where we meet Jesus and get to know him and hear his voice. This must be done every day. Keep your nose in Scripture, and particularly in the Gospels. Get to know the Gospels very well. May I encourage you to pick a Gospel to know really well. For you activist types, get to know the Gospel of Mark. For you who like life neatly organized, get to know Matthew. For you who have a compassion for the marginalized, get to know Luke. For you who are contemplative and philosophical, get to know John. Think of Scripture as the place where Jesus Skypes himself to you. This is the Skype screen where he meets you and speaks to you, no matter where you are or where he is.
3. **Discipleship involves participating in God's work.** We grow up into him as we learn to serve with him. He gifts us in particular ways, and as we learn to use our gifts, we meet him in other people.
4. **Discipleship involves community/mentorship.** No one will mature without being a part of a small group of people. Jesus calls us into community not only on Sundays, but also in-between Sundays. Are you in a growth group? Are you in a men's or women's study? I encourage you to be intentional about finding a small group of people to meet with outside of Sunday mornings. Within this community, it is helpful to have

a coach or mentor who will walk alongside of us and help us in the unique issues we are facing.

5. **Discipleship involves prayer.** We have the privilege of carrying on a constant conversation with him all day, every day, because he is with us, always. Options for prayer include praying the Psalms, praying Paul's prayers, praying John 17, and praying the Lord's Prayer.
6. **Discipleship involves participating in communion (and baptism).** We are going to need sustenance along the way. This is where he gives himself to us again and again and again as the bread of life.
7. **Discipleship involves creating space.** It is critical that we create space to get away and focus on him at regular times throughout the year. We need to get away to where the pace is slowed down and we can be still, know that he is God, and hear his voice.

There are many more, but I've listed just seven for your reference. Please do not take these as rules; these are not rules. These are ideas for having intentionality in your faith, “working out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12), as Paul says in Philippians.

In our lives, Christ is Lord of all. Therefore, I'll leave you with a portion of the famous prayer of St. Patrick's breastplate:

*Christ before you,
Christ behind you,
Christ on your right,
Christ on your left,
Christ above you,
Christ beneath you,*

*And, most importantly,
Christ within you.
Amen.*

1. E Stanley Jones, *In Christ* (Abingdon, Nashville, 1961), 89.
2. Jon Meacham, 10 Big Ideas: Preach Like Your Faith Depends on It *Time Magazine*, (13 March 2013), n.p. Cited Aug 21, 2017. Online: <http://ideas.time.com/2013/03/14/10-big-ideas/slide/preach-like-your-faith-depends-on-it/>
3. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (HarperCollins, New York, 2009), xii.
4. Dahle, Lars and Dahle, margunn Serugstadm, *The Lousanne Movement, A Range of Perspectives* (Wiipf and Stock, Eugene), 297.
5. Regent Audio: Course: 3736S - Christian Educating and Equipping. Lecture: 3736E- Ephesians as a “Discipleship Manual” and Equipping the Marketplace Lecturers: Darrell Johnson and Paul Williams @ -1:09:00

