

“Are You A Real Disciple?”
Stewarding the Presence Series, Part 15

I was very blessed when I gave my life to the Lord as a 15-year-old kid. I had the most amazing youth pastor in the world. He wasn't even supposed to be the youth pastor. He was the assistant pastor of this 5,000-member church and had a tremendous amount of important work to do, but there was a need and he filled it well. When I was 19, another youth pastor had quit and left the church and they offered me an internship to run the ministry. This former youth pastor became my mentor, and he disciplined me and taught me how to preach and minister. There were so many times when I *saw* faithfulness in him, I didn't just hear about it. I would walk by his office and look in the window and see him on his knees in prayer. I saw how he loved his wife. He used to say things like, “Good talk Rudy but I need to go home and do Bible and spank my kids.” We got really close. He officiated my wedding and was comfortable enough to talk about my sweating in the middle of the ceremony. He handed me his hanky and said in front of 300 people, “this brother's forehead is looking like a glazed ham.” He really disciplined me. But the fullness of his mentorship didn't come to a head until I started doing the same thing he did for me to others. I disciplined and mentored a group of 13–15-year-old boys into walking with the Lord. I was there for these kids and tried to give them the best example I could.

This morning as we continue our series through the Gospel of John, I want to bring a challenge to you. How many understand that when Jesus said, “go and make disciples of all nations” He wasn't giving a suggestion. The Great Commission is actually a requirement for the Christian life. If you don't know every month our treasurer Miss Rita has to submit a report to the Foursquare. She needs to give totals for attending and giving and other matters. Every month minus a few here and there the section of how many decisions for Jesus and how many baptisms remain empty. It kills me inside. I believe South Gate Fellowship is called to be a presence-driven church in which we encounter God's presence and *express* His love and power. I believe God has not called us to be a mega-church, but I believe He has called us to be a church planting church. There are 40,000 people in Duncanville alone and I know they are not all saved...let alone disciplined. You and I have not fully and successfully lived the Christian life until we have become disciple makers. Now the good news is that if you currently have children, you are automatically by default a disciple maker. But I pray you join me and partner with this church because we are gearing up to have 2026 be the year of evangelism. I am personally contending for salvations, baptisms, multi-generational discipleship, and miracles right here in the house of God.

It is Biblical clear that the Great Commission of making disciples is a commandment. Luke 6:46 Jesus says, “Why do you call Me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?” We can't pick and choose what we want to obey and what we want to neglect. God has taken my heart captive to this pursuit of evangelism and discipleship. I can't lay my head down at night in peace knowing I am doing nothing about reaching the lost and teaching them about Christ.

Today I want to look at Jesus' command to His disciples in John 15 and learn how we can be true disciples. Specifically, we are going to look at seven marks of true discipleship. I pray you have open ears and hearts this morning because the Lord needs you and I to step into our roles of disciple making disciples. Just think about how different this world would be if every Christian

stepped into their role as a disciple maker. If fathers stepped into their true roles in homes. If children grew up with examples of their parents loving the Lord. Imagine how much crime and confusion would disappear if many had been disciplined. It's not too late and what if the seed to a lasting revival is in discipleship? If you have your Bibles go with me to the Gospel of John chapter 15:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

Jesus says here that any branch that does not bear fruit he “takes away.” In the Greek the word for “takes away” means to “lift up and to clean.” Remember Jesus is using an illustration here. He is speaking to people who know about farming and know about vineyards. I had a lady in a previous church that moved to the States from Italy. She owned a vineyard in Italy...how nice right. I preached on John 15 once and she came up to me after the service to give me an illustration. She said if a grape cluster touches the ground, you have to clean it and then lift it up higher, otherwise it will die. Jesus is using this example to show the disciples, “if you fail it is ok, I will lift you up. I will clean you. I will restore you.” But a branch that never produces fruit is basically good for nothing. Jesus said apart from Him we can do nothing. If you genuinely want to produce fruit it is a matter of abiding in Jesus and leaning on His help.

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. 12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. – John 15:1-16

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Jesus says volumes about discipleship in this chapter. But did you notice how big of a deal Jesus made bearing fruit? Did you also notice how abiding in the presence and bearing fruit produces joy in its fulness? So, you and I have been called to express the love and power of God around us and to make disciples who do the same. Today I want to quickly encourage you with what I call the “Seven Marks of Discipleship.” If you are taking notes please fill in Mark number one:

Seven Marks of True Discipleship:

#1 – Is Jesus First in your life? (Mark 8:34-38).

In recent years a head coach divorced his wife of 26 years when he left coaching a college team to become head coach in the National Football League. He said he needed a wife while coaching on the college level for social functions and to show families that he would be looking out for their sons. In pro football, however, she was an unnecessary accouterment and a distraction to winning. He said winning football was his number one priority and his two sons second. How tragic! In contrast to this, Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas cowboys said, "The thrill of knowing Jesus is the greatest thing that ever happened to me ... I think God has put me in a very special place, and He expects me to use it to His glory in everything I do ... whether coaching football or talking to the press, I'm always a Christian ... Christ is first, family second and football third."

Mark 8 Jesus says that if anyone wants to be His disciple, you have to take up your cross and follow Him. The cross in the first century was obviously a cruel form of execution. To take up a cross meant to die. Jesus call to die was not as a punishment for doing something bad, it was a call to die for something worth living for...Him. You cannot be a true disciple of Jesus if you have one foot in the world and one foot in the church. Jesus and His will must be the top priority in your life. When Jesus called His first disciples, they left everything behind to follow Him. They left their jobs, their families, and their communities to follow and be discipled by Jesus. Now were they perfect? Absolutely not. They struggled with pride, ego, fear, doubt just like you and I do. But they kept Jesus first and allowed His ministry to transform them. Being called to discipleship is not about being perfect, it is about allowing the work of God to have its way in your life.

#2 – Are you Following Jesus' Teaching? (John 8:31-32).

John 8:32 speaks about knowing the truth and the truth making you free. As we saw earlier, the word disciple means "learner." One of the most beautiful ways we can learn about the Lord is through the study of Scripture. From this moment right now in your life, you will be learning more about the Lord for all eternity. Isn't that a crazy thought? God is so big that it will take an eternity to understand Him. So, this should encourage you that you will never arrive. Every believer should be teachable and have a desire to grow in the Lord all the days of their life.

#3 – Are you Forfeiting your rights? (Luke 9:23).

Jesus uses such an interesting word here in Luke 9:23. He says, "if anyone wishes to come after Me he must *deny* himself..." In English the word deny means to "declare something to be untrue, to give a negative answer to, or to refuse to grant something." In the Greek it is similar but also connotes the idea of disowning. Jesus is saying to do this to yourself. If you want to be a disciple of Jesus it ain't about you no more. You need to deny your flesh and desires to follow and take on the Lord's.

#4 – Are you Bearing Fruit? (John 15:5-8).

I know two realities of having fruit trees. The first reality is that when you plant a fruit tree, it could be years before you see the fruit. The second reality is that once you have the fruit, you are desperate to give it away. I used to have a pastor friend who had property with a lot of fruit trees. He used to beg church members to come by and take all they wanted.

I had a crab apple tree in our backyard. They were tiny and bitter. A friend of mine said, you need to cut off several branches. The less branches you have the bigger the fruit you will produce. I made sense to me when Jesus talking about pruning in John 15. Sometimes the Lord will prune something in your life that is actually good but needing to be pruned so that you can grow in the area the Lord is needing you to grow in.

#5 – Are you Feeding your faith? (Matthew 10:1;8)

Jesus said in Matthew 10:1;8 Jesus gives His disciples the power and authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Some denominations believe this authority was reserved only for the first century disciples. If this is the case they need to believe the same thing about the Great Commission and other things the Lord said to do. Again, we can't pick and choose what we want to believe. This being the case, we need to understand that the same call to heal the sick and raise the dead are true today. Part of being a real disciples of Jesus is partnering with His Kingdom and stepping out in faith to see His power in action.

#6 – Are you a Friend to the lost? (John 13:34-35).

I was convicted years ago by a question a preaching asked the church. He said to count the number of unsaved friends you have. I could think of maybe two. The reality is that we typical have a circle of friends that believe what we believe, vote like we vote, and are into the things we are into. Jesus could associate with even sinners to love the lost. We must do the same. In fact, I have a pastor friend whose older dad would watch Fox news all day long, nothing else. Every time the pastor would go visit the dad; he would change it to CNN. How wrong is that. He said his dad needed to hear the other side from time-to-time haha. We need to find creative ways to find and make friends outside of the church. Every member of the church is a minister to the lost. I was having lunch with some peeps from the church this past Tuesday and at the register there was a place for business cards. So, I put our new Evangelism card down. Who knows how many people will see "Jesus Loves You" and while they are waiting for their food might actually use the QR code and hear the Gospel. It may or may not happen, but do you know what did happen? The Lady at the register started talking about it and asking if I was a pastor. I was able to start a conversation with a stranger all because I put down a little card. Did you know that for \$80 a year you can have a membership at Duncanville Rec center? You can use the gym, the pool tables, etc. Perfect place to talk to strangers. Isn't it funny that back in the day they told us not to talk to strangers? Now we order strangers on internet apps to pick us up in their cars and drive us places.

#7 – Are you Fostering discipleship? (Matthew 28:19-20).

There are a lot of things Christians have mastered and do very well. We have become professional students of the Word. We have Grammy level worship artists. We have some of the greatest writers. But one thing we do not do well is make disciples. I am praying for the day the church becomes a disciple making machine. We do not have the option to be slack in this area. If we are truly desiring to be Christlike in all that we do, we need to be like Jesus and make disciples.

Let me encourage you. You don't have to be the smartest person or the most well-versed person to disciple others. You don't have to have all the answers. What you need is a genuine love for God, a genuine love for others, and time.

The call to be a disciple maker was never a secret in Jesus' ministry. In Matthew 4:19 Jesus is beginning His ministry and inviting His first disciples Peter and Andrew. He says to these fishermen, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." From the very beginning Jesus made it clear that the life of a true disciple is not just to be an intellectual learner but to become a disciple making disciple. Jim Putman in *Real Life Discipleship* says about this verse that he believes this invitation actually describes the very definition of a disciple and that it should translate on a level of the head, heart, and hands of the believer.¹ The goal has always been clear that genuine disciples of Jesus are to love the Lord with all their heart, love the lost, and commit to a lifestyle of making disciples.

The highest calling a believer can operate in is that of a disciple. To be a life-long learner of the Messiah and live as a witness of His love and power is the greatest proof of one's salvation. Within the command of a disciple is the calling to learn from Jesus, love the Lord Jesus, and love others in the same way as Jesus. Modern culture can easily tempt and distract the believer from living this kind of life, yet the Scriptures are clear that believers must strive in all ways to live and serve as disciples who are known by their love.

¹ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2010, 22.