

Discipleship and Growth

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 November 2015

Preacher: Jeremy Tam

[0 : 00] All right. Last time I was up here, I was talking about Samson and Delilah and interracial relationships, and that was a lot of fun.

Jason remembers. My name is Jeremy. It's a pleasure to speak with you guys this morning. And as I've been preparing and thinking about discipleship, it's just been a reminder for me, too, because it's not so much me teaching you and talking at you, but, wow, it's been a reflection time for me to think about, what is God teaching me?

Because I don't want to be a hypocrite. I don't think anyone here wants to be a hypocrite. And even thinking about, God, what are you teaching me as I look at this amazing passage about being a disciple and abiding in you?

So we're continuing a series, if you've been around the last couple weeks, a series on a healthy church and what does that actually look like.

And Eric spoke about membership and community a couple weeks ago. Last week, Chris spoke about prayer. And today we're going to look at discipleship and growth, which is really something central to the family of God.

[1 : 18] Because if you are a Christian here today, you're also a disciple. If you're not a Christian today, well, Jesus is actually calling you to follow him and also be a disciple.

So this is a central aspect of what it means to be a church. And when I say the word discipleship, I think each of you may have different thoughts about what it means.

If you're not a Christian, I don't know how often you actually think about that word disciple. I don't think we think about that too often in the workplace and outside. And if you're raised in a church like me, the first thing that came to my mind was some kind of discipleship course that you take, you learn about the Bible and what it means to live as a Christian.

Now, a class about the subject of discipleship can be a really good thing. It can obviously be useful, but I want to stress from the very beginning today that when we look at what Jesus said in that passage we read together, it's clear that it has something to do with abiding in him.

It's something to do about bearing fruit for God. So while there must be some aspect of knowledge, obviously, in this process of discipleship, I think it's really clear from this abiding and this bearing fruit that it's so much more than just going through a discipleship course that you can just sit through in a few lectures or something like that.

[2 : 49] So we start with the basics. And I think discipleship is simply this process, this journey that we talk about in Watermark all the time of being a disciple. And I think by definition, a disciple is relational.

You can't be a disciple kind of just on your own in a room by yourself. Because a disciple, what, he always has a teacher. A disciple has a teacher, and there's a relational concept there.

In Luke 6, Jesus says this, A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher.

So in a nutshell, we can see that discipleship is the process in which a disciple becomes like the one who is teaching him. When I was a kid, maybe around grade one, primary school, elementary school, depending on where you're from, or year one, we lived in the U.S.

And my dad became the interim pastor of the church that we were a part of. And being a little more of a, I guess, more of a traditional conservative culture, he had to wear a suit when he preached, and he went up to the pulpit, and obviously as a little kid I saw him do that.

[4 : 12] And I guess for the story, if I remember correctly, the details are like one day I think I just decided I wanted to put on this little suit that I had for whatever reason. And I presume at grade one I asked my mom if I could wear it.

And obviously I dressed up in this little suit and I went to service. And after the service had ended and my dad had preached, I remember I ran up to the pulpit, and it was a proper pulpit, not just like a music stand here.

And I think being in that culture, it was a little more of a big deal because what is this kid doing running up to the stage? And I think at that age I was probably more like this. So people were asking me, what are you doing?

And I think I really quite calmly said, like chill. Well, maybe not literally chill, but like I just want to see what it's like to be my dad at this pulpit, talking and kind of looking out.

And that story came to mind because I think when I was a child, my dad was my teacher. I saw him that way. He was my role model. I followed him.

[5 : 15] I looked up to him. I wanted to be like him, even. And so what does a disciple look like? Inevitably, the disciple looks like the teacher that he or she is following.

I think this is where it gets really interesting because I guarantee you, guarantee you that every single one of us here is a disciple. Every single one of us.

And why do I know that? Well, you may not consider yourself as a disciple. You may not kind of describe or style yourself as a disciple. But your thoughts and your actions will always speak more clearly than the titles you give yourself.

And I think the reality is this. I don't think a person can live in society and live in a place without being a disciple of someone or something.

Think about this for a second. Think about the people, the trends, the ideas that have shaped your worldview, that have shaped your values, that have shaped your goals, whether it's throughout your upbringing or today.

[6 : 29] As a disciple, your teacher may be your parents, like I alluded to in that story with my dad, or it could be your professors and your teachers if you're in school.

It could be your colleagues, your friends, BuzzFeed, if you're an internet junkie, you know, you're always on that, looking at those lists, and it's kind of discipling you.

The people you follow on Twitter, Instagram, if you're social media savvy. Celebrities. Who doesn't love a good celebrity? Who is a celebrity that they follow?

You can just throw out a name. No one will judge you. Come on. Just one person. Tom Cruise. Excellence. Bastion of Scientology. Actually, I'll be honest, the first person, I don't know why, don't judge me, the first person I thought about was Miley Cyrus.

[7 : 30] And I don't know why, because I think I just kind of saw her growing up in like, I think it's the Disney Club or whatever it is, and then she kind of went off the rails or whatnot. And there's also, okay, going back to this, this endless, I think this will really hit home.

There's an endless list of experts in Hong Kong and the world that are always vying for our attention. You have experts from, I don't know, astrology and aerobics to parenting all the way to zoology.

And these experts, we look to them and we look to their advice and their wisdom. Now, let me be clear, I'm not saying that we should disregard these people. We're not saying we can't learn from these sources, but these things, these things can be very practical and very beneficial.

So don't get me wrong there. I think we can really learn from these people. Absolutely. Well, I don't know about Miley Cyrus. I don't know what I can learn from her. Actually, I think we can, honestly, even her.

And here's an aside. If you're following a celebrity, I was just thinking about this the other day, do you, do you actually think about their personal life, like Tom Cruise or Miley Cyrus or whoever?

[8 : 43] Like when I'm listening to that music, when I'm enjoying that movie, am I also praying for this person that I'm following, that I'm following, that I'm appreciating? Or are they just some kind of commodity?

So that was just, that was just an aside, but think about that. And I think even Miley Cyrus, we can learn from her and we can pray for her. So all these things are good things.

We can learn from them, we can appreciate them, we can get wisdom from them, but if we're disciples of these things, of these people, we're actually modeling our lives after them.

We're actually kind of developing these identities to become more like them. And I think if we're honest with ourselves, every single one of us here is yearning and searching for a teacher to show us how to live in the way that we're meant to live.

And guys, the scary thing for me is I've realized over the years that I think subconsciously I've been a disciple of many different things, many different trends and people, people that I thought would teach me, things that I thought would teach me the right way to live.

[9 : 56] But Jesus comes into the picture here and he says now, he says, I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.

And I think for the first time and maybe the only time in history, the teacher isn't just offering you a set of principles to live by or a nice product that you put on before you go to bed or 20 minutes of activity that you need to do to get right.

The teacher is offering himself, his own life as a substitute for mine and yours. We don't need a better way to live.

We're actually helpless. We need, we need this relationship. We need this Savior, Jesus, who can bring us back into a relationship with our Creator.

We were created to love God and to glorify Him and Jesus is the only teacher who can empower us to do that. He's actually the only teacher worth being a disciple of.

[11 : 12] Friends, that's the gospel, basically. That's the good news that allows us to be disciples of Jesus. Jesus. And so a disciple of Jesus, a disciple of Jesus, not just any disciple, a disciple of Jesus is actually someone whose entire life, every detail, every minutia, every aspect of your life is being radically transformed by the gospel.

The disciple's relationship with God and this unconditional love that this Heavenly Father gives, that is what shapes the entire disciple's life. Of course, the natural follow-up question you might have to this, well, then what does it actually look like to be a disciple of Christ?

What are these marks or the mark of being a disciple? That's what Jesus is talking about in verse 5 when He says, 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. And in verse 8, my Father is glorified by this that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

There it is. The evidence of being a disciple of Jesus is to bear fruit for God's glory. And I've been studying this and as I've been looking at this imagery of fruit, it's really helped me to honestly appreciate fruit more because I mean, I enjoy fruit generally.

[12 : 51] It's generally sweet and juicy and stuff but I'm really more of like a meat guy and beef, chicken, pork, lamb, yeah, those are all meat so whatever kind of meat you want and pasta, noodles, carbs, you know, good, good Asian there, I love my rice.

And fruit's okay. I like it but it's kind of almost more on the vegetable category. It's more just like, okay, I'll eat it because I know it's healthy unless it's mixed into like frozen yogurt or ice cream and that's wonderful but as I've been looking at this fruit analogy a bit more, I think we can actually see that it really teaches us a lot of things and I don't think it's a mistake that God used fruitfulness as this image.

Have you ever thought about the fact that bearing fruit, if you're a branch, you bear fruit, it's actually exclusively to feed other people? Because if you're a branch right here, you don't eat your own fruit, right?

You don't bear fruit because you just want to look nice or whatever. The fruit's for eating. Ask a farmer. Ask someone who loves fruit. Not me, but ask someone who loves fruit.

fruit. And then, have you ever thought about the fact that fruit is also inherently about reproduction in a botanical sense? Inside every fruit or connected to every fruit is a seed or seeds.

[14 : 19] So in that fruit itself is the beginning of new life, new disciples and that is how we're also called to make new disciples of Christ.

It's always outward focused. The fruit's not about the branch. The fruit doesn't need to be eaten by the branch. The branch just bears it for others.

It's outward focused. And if we survey the New Testament, you'll actually come across all these different examples of spiritual fruit. So I hope this gives you a little bit of a practical look at what we see in Scripture.

Romans 1, we bear fruit when we win others to Christ. When we share the gospel with them and God brings them into the family of God. John 4, there's this idea that we are all as Christians part of this harvest.

The entire church is part of this harvest. We are actually living fruit. Romans 15, Paul actually considers financial giving. He calls that as fruit when he's being supported by these Christians who

are dedicated to Christ.

[15:23] And obviously we know Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit. It's this kind of Christian character that reflects God's glory and makes Christ real to others.

Colossians 1, even our good works are considered to be fruit that grows out of our life. And lastly, Hebrews 13, the praise that comes from your lips, the songs that we were just singing, the Scripture, the prayers, the praise that come from our lips, the Scripture says that that is fruit for God's glory.

So let's summarize. We see that actually Jesus comes into our life to restore our relationship with our Heavenly Father. And as we follow Him, the mark of a disciple is to bear fruit for God's glory. And we see these examples in Scripture. But today, I'm not too concerned about kind of really unpacking those specific examples.

I mean, those are important, and if you want to talk about it more, I would love to. But I think there's a deeper issue here than those examples of fruit, because the more foundational issue is this.

[16:36] On the one hand, we're brought into this loving relationship with God. On the other hand, we have this purpose, this calling, this command to bear fruit.

So how do we get from one to another, from A to B? How do we actually bear that fruit? You know, does the branch simply say to itself, grow, you know?

Apples, grow from my branch. Durian, grow from my, if you like durian, grow from my branch. No. Why? Because in the passage, what does Jesus say?

The branch is lifeless without the vine. Verse 5, we need to abide in Jesus, who is the true vine. So abide is that key word, and it's not a word we commonly use.

I don't know when's the last time you said, hey, let's abide here. I mean, if you're kind of like in law or something, you might think, oh, I'm abiding by these terms and rules or whatever, but this is not abiding by something.

[17:37] This word, abide, actually means, it's a little more archaic. It means to remain, to stay, to wait, to wait for, to continue in a state that you've already been.

As some of you may be thinking, well, that doesn't seem very hard to remain. You know, if we all sat here for the next five hours and just kind of went limp, that would very much be abiding in these chairs, right?

But then, after a few hours, the cyber port staff might start coming in, and they'll be like, hey, we want to pack up these chairs. And then, some of you might start getting bored and hungry.

Some of your kids might be wondering, where the heck are you? And they'll be calling you. Maybe a more realistic example. A lot of you have come here to Hong Kong from overseas, or you've traveled.

I'm sure there's many compelling and interesting reasons why God has moved you from place to place. I'm not trying to say that sitting in this room is the same as being a disciple or moving around is bad, but I want to say that it's actually not that easy, if you think about it, to really abide.

[18:53] Because in this world, in this society, there's always forces and influences that are trying to shape your attention, that are trying to draw you and pull you from one place to another.

They might be good things, but they're still drawing you and pulling you. It's not actually that easy to stand firm in this society today.

All those teachers that we discussed before, those experts or whatever, celebrities, the people, the things that you might be disciples of, they're always there.

They're always calling, always beckoning, whether consciously or subconsciously, with promises of happiness and contentment. And if you think about it, abiding in Christ isn't just like a chair that you plop into and you just like, it's not just like a, it's not a place per se, it's actually a relationship we have with Jesus and our Heavenly Father.

And as a teacher, Jesus actually has something to say about what it means to abide in this relationship. Verse 10, he says, 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.

[20:12] I just want to be really clear with this verse here. Jesus is saying that, he's not saying that we earn his love by keeping his commandments. Actually, in chapter 14, the previous chapter, Jesus actually says that if we love him, we will obey his commandments.

That's just very natural. When you love somebody, you want to obey them. God's love for us is what inspires us to move back to him, to be moved to obey him.

The obedience is simply a result of that love and as we keep his commandments, that obedience will very naturally express itself and it will help us to remain in his love.

So what kind of commandments are we talking about here? Let's go to verse 12. Jesus says, this is my commandment that you love one another just as I have loved you.

And there are so many fruits of the spirit and different examples of the fruit that we've looked at but I think it really boils down to this. When you look at your life, is it marked by a supernatural, unconditional love for the people around you, for the other people?

[21 : 23] I'm not talking about the people that you naturally get along with or people that you're going to benefit from. I think you don't need Jesus to tell you that everyone will naturally love people that love them and are lovable.

I'm talking about people that you don't really get along with that aren't like you at all. I'm talking about people whose personalities rub you in the wrong way, who are different from you. I'm talking about strangers and maybe even people who dislike you. People that are just inherently different from you.

When you look at the people in your community groups, when you look at the people in your church, in Watermark Church, do you see all the people whom God has called you to love just like Jesus loves you?

I think sometimes we get caught up in trying to be good Christians by thinking and saying the right things. I know I do. Having the right doctrines, trying to navigate our work in a godly manner, and I'm saying all those things are really good things, but if we look at this passage, what ultimately defines us as disciples of Jesus is love.

[22 : 38] An obedient love for God and others so that all of our life decisions are actually shaped by that love. Your time, your money, the jobs and careers you choose, the places you move, they are actually fundamentally grounded and shaped by this love you have for God and others.

It's about continually going back to Jesus' love and then choosing to love others even when I don't feel like it. I know it's hard to love like that and I've been thinking a lot about what hinders me from being that disciple that Jesus calls me to be.

I think I'm relatively solid in my beliefs and my understanding of God. I think I have a relatively comfortable grasp of theology. Some of you might beg to differ and I think I'm a relatively nice person.

Again, some of you may beg to differ but when I think about this command, not just fluffy, I'm nice and I like to think positive thoughts about myself, when I actually think about this command to love people in the way that Jesus loves me, I am amazed at how lukewarm my love is.

Sometimes I don't think I can even call it love because I feel like it kind of cheapens that word. I struggle with loving people that are, honestly, I don't find lovable.

[24 : 05] It's so easy to love people that are cute and so easy to pick up that cute little baby. You know, I'd pick up that baby any day and give it a big kiss if Donna lets me. But what about the unlovable people?

What about the people that would never make it onto the cover of a magazine, who aren't good looking, who aren't charismatic, who aren't interesting? Luke 14.

Jesus has this very well-known passage, I'm sure you've heard it before, about the cost of being a disciple. He says, if anyone comes to me and doesn't hate his family and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Now, is Jesus saying that we literally need to hate our families to be his disciple?

Obviously not, since that would go directly against his command to love. But I think Jesus is speaking in hyperbole and he's being so sort of drastic and extreme because he's saying that our love for him needs to be so clear and so absolute that everything else compared to that, it just pales in comparison.

[25 : 21] It almost seems like it's hate when compared to our love for Jesus. Relationships, possessions, everything, it all pales in comparison.

And I think he was so extreme in this teaching because he knows, Jesus knows that there are so many things that distract us from him. He knows that there are so many things that stop us from resting in his love.

He knows that there are so many things that we use and people we use, things we use as excuses to not obey our Heavenly Father, to not trust him.

In this relationship with our Heavenly Father, we've been called to keep his commandments. Simply stated, it's like being obedient to your dad. If you recall from last week's sermon, Chris talked about Lord's Prayer, and I think it's really important to continue from that, and it's important to kind of build on that, how we pray to our Heavenly Father, how we see our Heavenly Father.

We're not talking about a sinful, imperfect parent that you might have in your life today. We're talking about the creator of the universe.

[26 : 42] This is God, your Heavenly Father, my Heavenly Father who loves his children unconditionally. So when Jesus tells us and commands us to keep his commandments, we have to think about it in this context.

Jesus knows that we tend to think that we've got it all figured out. Because we're adults in here, right? We've got it figured out. We put on that facade that we know what we're doing.

I often say things that I've no idea what I'm talking about, but it just sounds eloquent and makes me look good. The truth is, if you're looking at your Heavenly Father and you're trying to even imagine what he sees when he looks at us, we're not adults.

We're children in his eyes. I was talking to a friend this past week. She works as a waitress. She's a mother of a grown man.

I guess her son's in his 20s. And she was just sharing with me about some of her struggles. And she knows she shouldn't be doing some things.

[27 : 50] She knows she's wrestling with some things. But she was saying that she shouldn't complain to God. She's saying, I don't want to complain to God or be going to Him about these things, about these struggles.

Because God has already done so much for her and for her son. And I was listening and my heart was just kind of sinking and breaking a little bit because it just seemed to me like she didn't see God as her Heavenly Daddy.

And she didn't see herself as His daughter. It reminded me of our tendencies, I think, as adults. And guys, to be honest, when it comes to discipleship, I think all of us are actually more like kids going through puberty.

Just children going into that awkward adolescence. You know why? Because we are experiencing some of that freedom and that independence. You know? We've learned a few things, but then we think we actually know everything.

We've learned maybe 1%, but somehow we think that 1% is everything. If you have preteens or teens in here, you know what I'm talking about, right? You know that.

[29 : 05] We just don't really trust our parents. That little boy who ran up into that pulpit to be like his dad, well, he grew up and he started thinking that he knew better and he had gotten past that.

And in this passage, we're not even talking about an imperfect human parent. We're talking about a relationship with God, our Heavenly Father. So how much more can we trust our Heavenly Father and his commandments?

Let's just take a moment to reflect here and just ask God to reveal and be real with him because he knows anyway. What's an area in your life today that you're not trusting in your Heavenly Father? You know, what's stopping you from obeying his commandments? What's hindering you from truly loving the people around you?

Hindering you from loving that unlovable person in your life? God wants us to see the cross.

[30 : 18] He wants us to see how much he loves him. God wants us to be a disciple of Jesus is actually pretty simple, I think. We need to go back to that cross every day, remembering how much God loves us.

Remember that he's already shown you and proved to you that he loves us by dying in our place.

When I started thinking about this sermon, I was imagining the Great Commission, you know, making disciples, going out and doing all these awesome things and there's a place, there's definitely a time and place to talk about that, about making disciples and the Great Commission and training up people.

But then I slowly realized the reality. Every single one of us in this room right now, we're making disciples all the time. You've been making disciples this past week, this past month, even this morning.

We've been making disciples based on our obedience or lack of obedience to God. The Apostle Paul says in Corinthians, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

Who are you imitating today? The things you value and believe, they inevitably come out in your words and your actions.

[31 : 50] Trust me, I know it. I've seen that out of the overflow of my heart. And you're consciously and you're subconsciously pointing people towards the most important things in your life.

Look at your children. Look at your students if you're a teacher. Look at your employees and your colleagues. Look at your friends. Whether you realize it or not, you're making disciples of some sort. So as we remember Jesus' love this week as a church, just think intentionally about loving people with God's love. faith. And it just might be a really small step of faith.

It probably should be for most of us, I think. Just take a step of faith and start reaching out to someone new that you've never really reached out to before. Or make an effort to love someone who you've been finding it difficult to love.

Whether you're a Christian today or not, I really, I just want you to know and remember. I think that's what God wants us to remember. We were created to be loved by God first.

[33 : 03] Starts there. We were created to love him back. And we were created to share that love with others. So what's the next step for you right now in trusting Jesus and abiding in him?

What's that next step? Let's pray. God, I just declare that you are our heavenly father.

God, I pray that we would not forget that, not for a minute. That we won't think subconsciously, oh God, we've grown up.

We're your equals now. Now we know what we're doing. But I pray that this morning we would come running back to love us and you want the best for us. And so even when obedience doesn't seem to make sense to these adults that we think we are, we are willing to step out in faith and trust you.

God, help us to see that. Help us to see that we are just children in need of a father. Lord, whether we have put our faith in you this morning already or not, Lord, I pray that you would show us what that next step is.

[34 : 31] that you would remind us, God, that you are pursuing us, you are seeking us, you are loving us. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.