

Hey everyone, so glad you could join us today. If you're new to Cornerstone, my name is Steve and I'm the Discipleship Pastor here.

Speaking of discipleship, we're in a series on that very subject. It's called *Following Jesus: Find Your Next Step*. If you're wondering what discipleship is, it can be defined as:

BEING with Jesus to LEARN from Jesus how to BECOME like Jesus.

As you follow Jesus and learn to live in his presence each day, he transforms you by his Spirit to become more and more like him. Jesus puts it this way:

"It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master."<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to what some believe, discipleship isn't something reserved for super-Christians—you know, for those who happen to be extra serious about their faith. Rather, **discipleship is what being a Christian is all about.**

Throughout the biblical gospels, Jesus' call to all of us and to each of us is, "Follow me." That's the call of discipleship.

And the church's number one job is to make disciples of Jesus. If the church isn't developing people who are becoming more and more like Jesus, then the church cannot possibly expect to be effective in its mission to the greater community and the world.

Therefore, a key question for this church, and any church, is: *What's our plan for making disciples?*

Cornerstone's plan involves a framework called the Discipleship Pathway, and it pretty much shapes our entire approach to ministry.

The framework consists of 5 parts—5 "Es" — each of which is a vital aspect in your development as a follower of Jesus. In this series, we're unpacking each of the 5 Es of Cornerstone's Discipleship Pathway, and what they mean for your life.

Last week, in a powerful sermon, Pastor Jeremy looked at what it means to ESTABLISH Identity in Jesus—which is the first of the 5 Es— and today, we're going to look at what it means to **EMBODY the Jesus Way of Life.**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:25a (NKJV)

This aspect of the Discipleship Pathway is all about learning to put Jesus' commands and teachings into practice.

Now, what I'd like to do is circle back to a passage about discipleship that we looked at a couple weeks ago. This is a very familiar passage to many of us, and it's an especially important passage when it comes to discipleship. At the very end of Matthew's gospel, just before Jesus was about to ascend back into heaven, it says:

Then Jesus came to [his disciples] and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."<sup>2</sup>

These words of Jesus are known as The Great Commission. It's literally a *co-mission*—a mission that we share together with Jesus and each other.

What is this mission that we share together? The mission is to *make disciples* of all nations.

What does this disciple-making mission involve? For one thing it involves *baptizing* those who become disciples of Jesus. We're looking forward to baptizing some folks near the end of June.

What else does this disciple-making mission involve, according to the passage? It involves *teaching people to obey everything Jesus has commanded*.

So—and this is very important— **discipleship involves actively putting Jesus' commands into practice.**

Earlier in Matthew's gospel, Jesus emphasizes the very same theme. He says:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”<sup>3</sup>

So Jesus is quite clear and straightforward about the fact that discipleship involves learning to put his words into practice— learning to obey, to actually *do*— everything Jesus has commanded us. It’s right there in the text, in black and white, plain as day.

But here’s a question: To what extent is this really on our radar as Christians? To what extent is it on your radar? The late great Christian philosopher Dallas Willard said that many North American churches seem to skip right over this part of Jesus’ Great Commission. Willard has famously referred to this as the Great Omission.

But if we’re not learning to put what Jesus has commanded us into practice, and if we’re not teaching, equipping and empowering others to do the same, then we’re not making disciples.

Therefore, we’ve woven the EMBODY component into Cornerstone’s Discipleship Pathway. It’s all about putting Jesus commands into practice—it’s about embodying—actually living out—the way of life Jesus has taught us.

Because in church life, it’s far too easy to hear Jesus’ words, and then just kind of leave it at that. I know I do that sometimes. Do you? If that’s you at times, click on the button in the chat area to say, “Yeah, my hand’s up on that one.”

**MOMENT: I often hear what Jesus says without doing it.**

All too many Christians today are merely hearers of Jesus, but not doers of what he says. But the Bible warns us in James:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.<sup>4</sup>

Far too many church gatherings—whether worship services, small groups or classes—have had this kind of feel [show picture]—that of a **lecture hall**. Before the pandemic, Christians

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> James 1:22-25 (NIV)

would come to worship services week after week, sit in rows, look at the back of each other's heads, and hear Jesus' words proclaimed. Or they would come to Bible classes or meet in each other's homes for small group Bible study, and do what? They would take in the *information*.

Of course, this past year, many Christians have been taking in information about Jesus online—on platforms like this one, or in small groups or classes on Zoom.

Whether we're in-person or online, when the service is over, or when the group or class is over, what happens all too often? If we've met in person, we just go home and leave it at that. If we've met online, we turn off our devices and leave it at that. And the same cycle gets repeated week after week. Hear Jesus' words, go home, and repeat. Hear Jesus' words, turn off your device, and repeat. All too often we hear Jesus without getting around to doing what he said.

Many, many years ago, I attended a church known for its great teaching ministry. In many ways, it was the ultimate lecture hall church. Sunday morning services centred on the teaching time. Then there was the Christian education hour, featuring more Bible study, more teaching. Then, we'd come back for evening service where there was more... teaching.

And all of it was great teaching, gifted teaching, to be sure. But in spite of that, I sometimes found frustration welling up within me as I participated in the life of that church. Why? Well, in hindsight, I think it's probably because there were too few outlets available for me to put all the stuff I was learning about into practice. I was being taught some great truth, but very little about what to actually do with it.

I mean, can you imagine a driving academy where you sit in lectures and read books about driving, but never have the chance to get behind the wheel? Can you imagine a cooking class where great chefs give interesting talks about their most delectable dishes, but you never get to do any tasting, or hands-on cooking?

Biblical teaching is an absolute necessity, please don't get me wrong on that. Teaching is a huge part of what I'm called to do as a pastor. In fact, I think we need more good Bible teaching, not less. But good Bible teaching should always direct people to put biblical truth into practice.

If you are locked into a pattern of merely hearing Jesus' words without learning to live them, it's probably time to ask yourself if you're a follower of Jesus, or merely his fan. Because authentic followership—true discipleship—involves learning to obey everything Jesus has commanded us, and teaching others to do the same.

But how do we go about doing that? Well, for many years now, we've been endeavouring to make more of our gatherings at Cornerstone— both in-person and now online— to be a little less like a lecture hall (where we passively take in information), and a little more like a gym (where we're invited to train) or a laboratory (where we're encouraged to experiment). Or, pick any comparable image that works for you, like an art studio, rehearsal hall or carpentry workshop.

These are the kind of places where we hone our technique, develop proficiency, and practice our craft. At Cornerstone, we want our gatherings—gatherings of all shapes and sizes— to include opportunities for people to learn how to put Jesus' teachings into actual practice. As discipleship practitioner Mark Scandrette writes:

I believe that we need to recover a sense of immediacy and action in our spiritual practices—a path to discipleship that is more like a karate studio than a lecture hall. To experience the kingdom of God [we] should get together and simply try to do the things Jesus instructed his disciples to do.<sup>5</sup>

Now instead of me explaining how this can happen in my own words, let me share with you some words from some folks who were once part of a small group at Cornerstone that got really intentional about putting the teachings of Jesus into practice.

One of this group's members explains that:

*We wanted to put Jesus' commands into actual practice. Our small group tried a whole variety of experiments and then we debriefed them afterwards as a group. One of the first experiments we tried had to do with embracing the security we have in Jesus. I hadn't realized what a hoarder I had become. I stored up enormous amounts of food in my pantry and freezer. Somehow, that made me feel safe. For seven days, I pledged not to buy any new food (other than fresh fruit, veggies and milk) and cooked only with what we had in the pantry and freezer. The experiment made me realize how greedy I had become and how much I relied on myself instead of relying on God to provide for my daily needs.*

*Another experiment we tried had to do with community—because Jesus tells us to love one another. The people in our group paired up. For seven straight days, my partner and I checked in with each other at the beginning of the day and then again at the end of the day. We decided to pray breath prayers throughout the day – a different sentence of the Lord's Prayer each day. Do you know what it's like to pray "Your Kingdom come, your will*

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Scandrette, Practicing the Way of Jesus:

*be done," all day? It really changed my perspective and I became aware of how consumed I was with my own agenda instead of God's agenda.*

Another member of that same group testified that:

*I practiced experiencing Jesus' presence during a big exam by picturing him in the empty seats, and also standing next to me. This helped calm my anxiety [after all, Jesus teaches us not to worry, and it's his presence that brings peace]. Furthermore, after the exam, the practices I learned helped me take captive thoughts of failure that kept creeping into my mind.*

These folks discovered the difference that putting Jesus' words into practice can make in your life.

Let me add that Cornerstone also offers a range of outlets that allow you to serve, which is a huge part of putting Jesus' teachings into practice.

And in most of our sermons, we preachers try to be quite intentional about giving you at least one takeaway to help you apply what's been taught. Quite often in our messages, we'll recommend or provide practical resources designed to help you embody the Jesus way of life. That's something I'll be doing later in this message, by the way.

Speaking of resources, Cornerstone has a growing a library of custom online and print resources that that we've developed, all designed teach you how to do a range of biblical practices. We have several daily prayer guides, and worksheets on practices like sharing your faith, hospitality, fasting, contentment and generosity— the list goes on and on.

Along with what we've developed in-house, we've also curated a range of what we think are some of the best outside resources available for learning how to put Jesus' commands into practice—from books to training guides to apps to other online video and music resources.

And we also offer one-on-one opportunities, as well as classes and workshops, all geared to help us help each other learn to live God's word.

Now if you've been with us for the past couple of weeks, you've heard us talk about how at the end of this series, we're going to be launching a custom online discipleship assessment tool that we've been developing over the past several months. This tool will help you target the area of the Discipleship Pathway where you most need to grow, and then it will connect you with several resources and opportunities you can choose from to help you grow in that area.

Launch day for this online assessment tool is three weeks from today. When that time comes, make sure you take the assessment and find your next step on the Discipleship Pathway.

That said, there's one thing we need to remember. No assessment tool, no resource, no opportunity is enough on its own to help you learn to obey everything Jesus has commanded us. Those things can be wonderfully helpful, but listen. Unless you are walking in a real-time personal and living relationship with Jesus, those things will do you little good. That's because:

**Obedience TO Jesus flows from relationship WITH Jesus.**

One of the things Jesus commands us to do is to remain in him, like branches in a vine. In John 15, he says:

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing... When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.”<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the presence of Jesus, we can do nothing. Apart from a vital relationship with Jesus, there's no way we can bear the fruit of growing obedience to his commands in our daily lives.

So as essential as obedience TO Jesus is for discipleship, we'll be much better off if we focus not so much on “trying harder” to obey him, but on learning to live WITH Jesus—to walk in openness to his presence every day.

We see this in the Great Commission itself. In Matthew 28, we find that learning to obey everything Jesus commanded is dependent on his presence with us. That's why Jesus closes the Great Commission with these words:

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”<sup>7</sup>

Obedience TO Jesus flows from relationship WITH Jesus. It is only the empowering presence of the Spirit of Jesus that makes it possible for you to learn put his words into

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<sup>6</sup> John 15:4-5, 8 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:20b (NIV)

practice in your own life, and also to teach others to do the same. Because you and I are meant to live not by our own strength and power, but by the strength and power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, one of the most practical things we can do as a church is to help people learn how to live in moment-by-moment openness to the presence of Jesus.

At this time, I'd like to offer you a free resource that will help you do just that. It's called the *Practicing the Presence of Jesus Worksheet*, and it lists some super-practical ideas to help you live in openness and attentiveness to Jesus' presence in your life throughout the moments of your days. Just go to the link on the screen or in the chat to download the worksheet, and you can start experimenting with some of these practices today.

Let me offer a final word of clarification to conclude this message.

Jesus does not tell us to obey his commands so that we can earn or merit salvation. Obeying Jesus has nothing whatsoever to do with escaping damnation by jumping through a prescribed number of religious hoops or chalking up enough morality points. Salvation from sin comes through God's grace alone. Salvation is not based on what we do, but on what Jesus has done for us through his cross and resurrection.

Neither does Jesus call us to obey his commands simply because he wants us toe the line and "just do what we're told." He doesn't call us to follow rules; he calls us to follow him. Remember, obedience to Jesus flows out of relationship with Jesus. Jesus doesn't merely want our compliance—he wants us. He wants our love, because he offers us all of his. And his love for us is exactly what we see in his promise to be with us always. Because those you love, you want to be with. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow Jesus, and what does following someone require? It requires that you stay close to them.

The more we put Jesus' commands into practice, the more our lives will shine like a beacon for the world to see. As we *Embody the Jesus Way of Life*, people will look at us, and say, "Wow! I didn't know life could be like that—so abundant, loving, kind, hopeful, content, and self-controlled!"

When they ask us how we live such lives, we will point them to our Master— Jesus—and let them know that through him, they too can have the same kind of life, beginning now, and carrying on into eternity.

This is exactly what Jesus had in mind when he said in Matthew:

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.<sup>8</sup>

So it all comes back to mission. Jesus calls us to be and to make disciples who obey his commands so that the world will be drawn to him through the example of our lives as his presence shines in and through us.

So in the week ahead, stay close to Jesus—try some of the practical ideas in the worksheet to help you with that—and let him shine through your life for the sake of others as you receive strength from him to put his words into practice.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:16 (NIV)