

Well today we begin a sermon series that on the one hand is new and yet on the other hand is something of a continuation of our previous series.

If you were with us for the last series, you know that it was all about... *discipleship*.

Now discipleship is an incredibly important topic in the Bible, and it's also incredibly important when it comes to how you live your life each and every day as a follower of Jesus.

What is discipleship? In our last series, we defined it 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, from the inside out, to become more and more like him. As Jesus put it:

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

And the church's number one job is to make disciples of Jesus. If the church isn't equipping and developing people to become more and more *like* Jesus, then the church cannot possibly be effective in its mission to reach the greater community and the world *for* Jesus.

Therefore, a key question for this church, and any church, is: What's our plan for making disciples? Cornerstone's plan involves a 5-part framework called the Discipleship Pathway, which is what our last series was all about.

This framework pretty much shapes our entire approach to ministry, and last Sunday, we launched a custom online assessment tool based on this pathway. The tool is designed to help you discern your next step as a follower of Jesus.

Have you done the assessment already? If so, go ahead and click the button in the chat to say that you have.

¹ Matthew 10:25a (NKJV)

If you haven't taken the Discipleship Pathway Assessment yet, I very much encourage you to do so. Just follow the link that you'll find both onscreen and in the chat:
<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway>.

The new series we're beginning today will allow us to do a deeper dive into what scripture says about discipleship.

Quite simply, the series is called *Discipleship: 4 Perspectives*, and it's going to be a 4-week exploration of the theme of discipleship in each of the four biblical gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

You see, the gospel writers are kind of like the biographers of Jesus, and each tells the story of Jesus' life from a unique perspective. When you put those perspectives together, you get this wonderfully rich picture of who Jesus is, and what his life and ministry were all about.

By studying the theme of discipleship in each of the four gospels, what you're going to get is a wonderfully rich picture of what following Jesus means, as well as the implications it has for your day-to-day life.

As we explore these biblical perspectives on discipleship over the next month, I wonder what God has in store for you. Pay attention each week to the inner stirrings of your heart. Pay attention to the things that resonate with you. Pay attention as well to the things that convict you—you know, those things that maybe make you say "ouch" a little bit. Because the things that stand out to you in those ways are probably areas where Jesus is inviting you to grow as his follower, as his disciple. In fact, at the end of this message, I'm going to ask which part of the sermon spoke to you the most, so pay attention to which part does.

Well, here we go—*Discipleship: 4 Perspectives*— starting today with the first of the four gospels, the Gospel of Matthew. What's the essence of discipleship according to Matthew's gospel, and what does that mean for you and me today?

We find the answers to those questions in the way Matthew portrays the disciples of Jesus in his gospel. How does Matthew portray the disciples of Jesus? He does so in four ways:

1. Disciples are close companions of Jesus.
2. Disciples understand and obey Jesus' teaching.
3. Disciples are realistic examples.
4. Disciples are Jesus' partners in ministry.

That, in a nutshell, is Matthew's perspective of discipleship. Now, let's unpack those one at a time, beginning with how:

1. Disciples are close companions of Jesus.

When Matthew uses the word *disciples*, he's usually referring to the small circle of Jesus' *closest* followers—the twelve disciples. Matthew sometimes refers to them as the apostles, or just the twelve. But most often, he simply refers to this group as *the disciples*.

Like the other gospel writers, Matthew is very well aware that Jesus had a wider group of disciples beyond the twelve. But Matthew doesn't give that wider circle nearly the attention that Luke does, for example. Matthew keeps his focus on this small band of Jesus' closest companions, and the reason he does this is to emphasize that authentic discipleship is about being with Jesus.

Remember our definition of discipleship? It starts with those very words. Discipleship is:

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

So first and foremost, Matthew shows us that **the heart of discipleship is about staying close to Jesus.**

The disciples are close enough companions to Jesus that he considers them his true family. In Matthew 12,

Jesus asked, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!" ²

Another way Matthew likes to emphasize how the disciples are in close companionship with Jesus is by contrasting them with other groups of people—namely the religious leaders and the crowds. Jesus sums up this contrast when he says in Matthew 12:

"Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me." ³

² Matthew 12:48-50 (NLT)

³ Matthew 12:30 (NLT)

Disciples - WITH Jesus

**Religious Leaders -
AGAINST Jesus**

**Crowds - Choice to be
WITH or AGAINST Jesus**

In Matthew, the disciples are the ones who are *with* Jesus. The religious leaders for the most part are *against* Jesus. And the crowds that Jesus and his disciples minister to are faced with a choice. They can either be *with* or *against* Jesus. No other alternative is offered.

The same choice is ours today, by the way. How you will you choose? Will you choose to be *with* Jesus?

At first, the crowds are amazed at Jesus' teaching and miracles. ⁴ And they sought him out to receive his compassionate attention. But just when you think that many in the crowds would make a commitment to *be with* Jesus, what happens? The religious leaders persuade them to go *against* Jesus, and the same crowds that once sought him out would ultimately demand that he be killed. ⁵

Even though the disciples would temporarily desert Jesus during the events surrounding his crucifixion, after his resurrection, where do we find the disciples— eleven out of the twelve of them, anyway? They are *with Jesus* once again. ⁶

And what are Jesus' final words to his disciples in the gospel of Matthew? He says:

"And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." ⁷

Do you know what that means? It means that this promise wasn't just for Jesus' original disciples. It's also for us today. Jesus is present and accessible to us, right here, right now, by his Spirit—the Holy Spirit.

And when you stop to think about it, what's especially amazing about this promise is that it means Jesus really *wants* to be with you! He *wants* to have an intimate personal relationship with you. He *desires* to have you live in close companionship with him each and every day—because he loves you! Those you love, you want to be with, right? I mean, have you ever considered that before? Jesus *desires* to be with you! Isn't that absolutely astonishing?

The heart of discipleship is about staying close to Jesus. In fact, your number one job as a disciple is to get close to Jesus and stay close to Jesus.

So what are you doing to get close and stay close these days? If you've been a little distant from him, as we all are from time to time, what will you do to get closer? Will you carve out

⁴ See Matthew 7:28 and 9:8

⁵ See Matthew 27:15-25

⁶ See Matthew 28:7, 10, 16-17

⁷ Matthew 28:20b (NLT)

more time for prayer and meditation on scripture, for example? If you haven't already checked out our [Practicing the Presence of Jesus Worksheet](#), I invite you to do so today. It includes some super practical tips for how to stay close to Jesus throughout the moments of your day.

Because learning *from* Jesus how to become *like* Jesus all hinges on *being with* Jesus. This connects to our next point about discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew.

2. Disciples understand and obey Jesus' teaching.

This is something Matthew emphasizes more than any other gospel writer.

The Gospel of Mark, by contrast, emphasizes how the disciples often failed to grasp what Jesus was teaching them. Matthew, while acknowledging that they were often very slow to get it, emphasizes that the disciples ultimately came to understand Jesus' teachings—not because they themselves were particularly bright or capable, but because— as we saw in the last point— they stayed close to Jesus, and kept on listening to what he had to teach them.

This is illustrated in Matthew 13, where Jesus teaches a series of parables to the crowds. Now a parable is a story that uses familiar everyday imagery to describe what God's kingdom is like. It's like a farmer planting seed. It's like yeast in a lump of dough. It's like hidden treasure. It's like a fishing net. Matthew explains that:

Jesus always used stories and illustrations like this when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.⁸

But when they were done ministering to the crowds, Jesus would then teach his disciples privately, unpacking the meaning of his parables so they could understand them more fully and deeply. Curious about his teaching methods, one day,

His disciples came and asked him, "Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?"

He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be

⁸ Matthew 13:34 (NLT)

given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.⁹

In this way, Jesus' parables served to reveal truth to those who wanted to know it and to conceal truth from those who were indifferent, from those who didn't care to listen and learn.

Are you staying close to Jesus? Are you listening to what Jesus wants to teach you? Do you read and study and absorb and pray over his teachings in scripture? Do you listen carefully and deeply to sermons on Sundays? Do you get around people who have a deeper walk with Jesus than you do, and learn from Jesus through them? If you keep at it, Jesus will get you to understanding in due time—not because of how smart you may or may not be—but because he's *the* Master Teacher.

Of course Jesus doesn't teach just to get you to the point of saying, "I get it." He teaches to get you to the point of saying, "I'll do it."

Matthew shows us that true disciples are those who not only understand but also obey. This theme carries through to the very end of Matthew's gospel where Jesus commissions his disciples to go to the nations and make new disciples, and in doing so they are to:

"Teach these new disciples to obey the commands I have given you."¹⁰

I talked about this theme in the sermon I did a few weeks ago on what it means to "EMBODY the Jesus Way of Life." In that message, we saw how **discipleship involves actively putting Jesus' commands into practice**. That's a theme we get from Matthew's Gospel.

In that message, we also talked about how **obedience TO Jesus flows from relationship WITH Jesus**. You see, 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 Jesus. This harkens back to our first point about how disciples are close companions of Jesus. Our understanding and obedience hinge on Jesus' empowering presence with us.¹¹

Next, Matthew portrays the disciples of Jesus as:

⁹ Matthew 13:10-13 (NLT)

¹⁰ Matthew 28:20a (NLT)

¹¹ See again Matthew 28:20b

3. Realistic examples.

Yes, in Matthew the disciples are those who come to understand and obey Jesus' teaching, but it's not like they're idealized. They're not portrayed as superheroes. In no way does Matthew attempt to hide their weaknesses, failures and flaws, but at the same time, he also highlights their strengths, successes and potential.

In other words, the disciples of Jesus are refreshingly human, and provide us with a realistic example of what a growing follower of Jesus looks like.

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew especially zeroes in on Peter as a realistic example of discipleship. Of the many instances of this throughout Matthew, the most classic is found in chapter 16.¹²

This is where in the space of a few short paragraphs Peter gets praised by Jesus for recognizing that he is the Messiah, and then he gets rebuked by Jesus—Jesus actually tells Peter “Get behind me Satan!”—for insisting that Jesus should never have to suffer and die.

Later, Peter would even deny that he ever knew Jesus just to save his own neck, but we also know he would go on to lead the church and ultimately lay down his life in loyal service to Jesus.

Matthew wants us to know that Peter and the other disciples serve as examples of what Jesus can accomplish in and through imperfect people—people like you and me. It's not about what you and I can do. It's about what Jesus can do in and through us when we stay close to him. I don't know about you, but I find tremendous relief and encouragement in that.

You know, preparing this message has me thinking about the example I've been to my kids. They've seen me at my worst, that's for sure. But through Jesus' patient work with me as I seek to get close and stay close to him, my hope is that my kids will also see more and more of Jesus in me as the years go by— and that this will kindle their own desire to get close and stay close to Jesus themselves— in spite of my many foibles, flaws and failures.

I'm so glad Matthew has written his Gospel in such a way as to portray Jesus' disciples as a realistic and very human example of what Jesus can accomplish in and through us, in spite of our imperfections. What will Jesus accomplish in and through *you*?

¹² See Matthew 16:13-23

Surely some of what he will accomplish through you will involve your partnership with him in ministry, because Matthew makes it clear that:

4. Disciples are Jesus' partners in ministry.

You see, staying close to Jesus as his disciple is never something you just do for yourself. Instead, it's what enables you to be and do what Jesus wants you to be and do for the sake of others— for the sake of people that he wants to reach and minister to and bless through you.

In Matthew, we read about how:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.¹³

And then Jesus gave his disciples a few more instructions and sent them out to minister to the crowds. So the disciples were very much Jesus' partners— his teammates and fellow workers— in ministry.

Of course in Matthew, all roads lead to the Great Commission that Jesus gives his disciples at the end of the Gospel. This is where the risen Jesus sends his disciples—including you and me—to go minister to a far larger crowd. He sends us to the nations—to all peoples.

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations..."¹⁴

Jesus calls his disciples to make more disciples. Did you know that's one of Cornerstone's Core Values?

CORNERSTONE CORE VALUE

¹³ Matthew 9:35-10:1 (NIV)

¹⁴ Matthew 28:18-19a (NLT)

Every disciple makes disciples: We understand that following Jesus includes helping others to follow Jesus.

In the Great Commission we're told that making disciples involves helping others identify with Jesus through baptism. It also involves teaching others to obey what Jesus commands.

But before any of those things can happen, making disciples begins with sharing the good news that forgiveness of sins is available to anyone and everyone through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If I can borrow just one verse from Luke's gospel, Jesus puts it this way:

"This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."¹⁵

Let me ask you a question: Do you ever share your faith in Jesus with others? Do you ever tell other people about Jesus?

For many Christians, the thought of sharing their faith with people who do not yet know Jesus is scary. But that doesn't change the fact that as disciples, Jesus calls us to be his partners in ministry, and that includes making disciples by sharing our faith with those who do not yet follow Jesus.

It doesn't have to be so scary. It can be natural and unforced, and there are many ways—accessible and doable ways—you can go about it.

To help you with that, I'd like to offer you a free resource called [10 Best Practices for Sharing Your Faith](#). Download the sheet, and try at least one of the best practices in the week ahead.

In this way, or in any other ways, how is Jesus calling you to be his partner in ministry in the weeks ahead?

Well today, we've considered four aspects of discipleship in Matthew's gospel.

1. Disciples are close companions of Jesus.

¹⁵ Luke 24:46b-47 (NIV)

2. Disciples understand and obey Jesus' teaching.
3. Disciples are realistic examples.
4. Disciples are Jesus' partners in ministry.

Do you remember how earlier I asked you to pay attention to what stood out most to you in the message? What resonates? What challenges you? What makes you say "ouch" a little bit? Those are probably the places where Jesus is inviting you to grow or stretch.

Well to close this message, I'd like to invite you to share which of these four points spoke to you the most today. Just type the number of the point that spoke to you the most (1, 2, 3 or 4) into the chat.

May you know blessing of walking in close companionship with Jesus this week! Amen.

Benediction

Since today we talked about Matthew's perspective on discipleship, I can't imagine a more fitting benediction for this service than the Great Commission that Jesus gives us at the very end of that gospel. So here it is once again—this is Jesus speaking to all of us, and to each of us:

"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

And all God's people said in the chat—amen!