

Well good morning everyone. It's great to be with you live!

Today we're wrapping up our series called *Discipleship: 4 Perspectives*.

Discipleship is all about what it means to follow Jesus, and in this series we're exploring that theme in each of the four biblical gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke—and today, we'll look at the theme of discipleship in John's gospel.

I'd like to start us off by telling you about a report that aired on MSNBC some years ago. The report was about this group that called themselves the *new vegetarians*. One of them, a 28 year-old woman named Christy, captured this group's viewpoint with these words:

I usually eat vegetarian... *but I really like sausage.*

Christy represents a growing number of people who eat vegetarian, but make some exceptions along the way. Bothered by this, some actual vegetarians pressured the new vegetarians to change their name. And the new name they chose for themselves is *flexitarians*. It's a real term—Google it.

Christy sums up what the flexitarian movement is about when she says:

I really like to eat vegetarian food, but I'm just not 100% committed.

Pastor Kyle Idleman suggests that *flexitarian* is a good word to describe how some people approach their commitment to Jesus:

I really like Jesus—but I don't really like serving the poor—and I'm not all that into the idea of going to church—and my resources are already spoken for. I love Jesus—he's really great and all—don't get me wrong—but don't ask me to save sex for marriage. I love Jesus—but don't ask me to forgive the person who hurt me. I love Jesus, but I'm just not 100% committed.

Such people say they follow Jesus. But they've made some exceptions. They want to be close enough to Jesus to glean some of his benefits, but not so close that it costs them all that much. It's a religious form of flexitarianism.

Can your commitment to Jesus ever be described as flexitarian?

If so, be reminded of Jesus' words that we heard from Luke's gospel last Sunday:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”<sup>1</sup>

It’s kind of funny, isn’t it? You’d think that in calling people to follow him, Jesus would find more attractive slogans than “deny yourself” or “take up your cross.” Wouldn’t Jesus draw more disciples if he had a slogan similar to the one that Burger King had back in the day? *Have it your way.*

But Jesus summons us to deny ourselves and take up our cross precisely because our insistence on “having it our way” is what got the human race into such a frightful mess in the first place.

You see, **the cost of discipleship is great, but the cost of non-discipleship is infinitely greater.** The late-great Dallas Willard, who wrote many modern-day classics on discipleship, breaks it down for us:

Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, non-discipleship costs you exactly that abundance of life that Jesus said he came to bring.

It’s in John’s gospel that Jesus says:

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”<sup>2</sup>

The very life of the risen Jesus infusing and filling our own lives to overflowing—both now and forever— is of infinitely greater value than whatever it may cost us to follow Jesus today.

There’s a button in the chat that says, “I can’t afford the cost of non-discipleship!” If you agree with that statement, go ahead and press that button now.

Speaking of John’s gospel, it’s time to explore what discipleship is about from John’s perspective.

Compared with the other gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—what’s unique about John is that he looks at discipleship through the lens of *belief*. For John, a disciple is someone who *believes* in Jesus.

Of course, the most quoted verse in the whole Bible comes from the gospel of John, and it has to do with belief in Jesus. What verse am I talking about? It’s John 3:16:

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:23 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> John 10:10 (NIV)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.<sup>3</sup>

So God sends his one and only Son into this fallen world in order to save and restore the whole created order. Those who *believe* in the Son will forever share in this great salvation, says John.

But what does it mean to “believe” in Jesus? A poll conducted by the Barna Group found that four in five Americans identify themselves as Christians—they claim to *believe* in Jesus. But of this group, less than half are involved in church on a weekly basis. Less than half think the Bible is reliable, and the vast majority have values that are much more reflective of mainstream culture than of scripture.

Is *that* what belief in Jesus is?

Later in the New Testament, James writes:

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”<sup>4</sup>

This verse makes it very clear that belief in Jesus for salvation involves far more than just intellectual agreement with the proposition that Jesus is Son of God. The demons believe that, says the text, but that doesn’t make them *believers*.

Listen carefully to what Billy Graham said about this:

If there is no change in a person's life, he or she must question whether or not they possess the salvation that the gospel proclaims... As I approached my 95th birthday, I was burdened to write a book that addressed the epidemic of "easy believism" ... It should not be surprising if people believe easily in a God who makes no demands, but this is not the God of the Bible. Satan has cleverly misled people by whispering that they can believe in Jesus Christ without being changed, but this is the devil's lie.

When John writes in his gospel about believing in Jesus, he definitely is *not* referring to “easy believism”.

For John, true belief is what makes a true disciple, and **the test of true belief is the way we live our lives.**

To be sure, this is a gradual process. It doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time. But if you truly believe in Jesus on the inside, then the evidence of that belief will increasingly show up on the outside— in the way you live your life.

What does that look like?

In his gospel, John emphasizes **three marks of true belief in Jesus.** The first mark of true belief, and therefore of true discipleship, is:

---

<sup>3</sup> John 3:16 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> James 2:19 (NIV)

## 1. Remaining faithful to Jesus' teachings.

In John chapter 8:

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."<sup>5</sup>

When he said these words, Jesus was addressing a crowd of Jews who claimed to believe in him. Jesus knew full well, though, that just saying, "Yeah, I believe," is not the same thing as manifesting the marks of true belief. The test of true belief for this crowd, said Jesus, would be whether or not they would remain faithful to his teachings.

The same is true of you and me.

This means that not only do we need to learn the *content* of Jesus' teachings—but more than that, we come to know the truth and power of Jesus' teachings in our own *experience*:

"And you will know the truth," says Jesus— not just in your head but in your heart and your experience— "and the truth will set you free."

As people come to *know* the truth of Jesus' word as it relates to their situation— not just cognitively, but experientially— then darkness retreats before the light, worry melts into peace, despair gives way to hope.

Based on both my personal and pastoral experience, I bear witness to you this morning—the truth of Jesus' teachings sets people free!

Why is that? It's because **in his teachings, Jesus always points us to himself**. All his words in one way or another are meant to lead us to *him*. Like in John's gospel, where Jesus says things like:

"I am the bread of life."<sup>6</sup>

"I am the light of the world."<sup>7</sup>

"I am the good shepherd."<sup>8</sup>

"I and the Father are one."<sup>9</sup>

"I am the resurrection and the life."<sup>10</sup>

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>11</sup>

When you take all of Jesus' teachings together, they have one great focus—Jesus himself. John tells us that:

---

<sup>5</sup> John 8:31-32 (NLT)

<sup>6</sup> John 6:35

<sup>7</sup> John 8:12

<sup>8</sup> John 10:11

<sup>9</sup> John 10:30

<sup>10</sup> John 11:25

<sup>11</sup> John 14:6

“These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”<sup>12</sup>

So Jesus’ teachings are summed up in who he is for us as the crucified and risen Son of God. Therefore, faithfulness to Jesus’ teachings will never lead us into a life of religious rule-keeping, but rather into an ever-deepening relationship with the precious person that those teachings point to—Jesus himself.

Let’s move on to the second mark of true belief:

## **2. Loving one another.**

The love we have for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ—particularly in the context of a local church like Cornerstone— is essential to what it means to be true believers, true disciples.

In John 13, Jesus said to his disciples:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”<sup>13</sup>

We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us, says the text. How has Jesus loved us? Well, he’s loved us unconditionally. He’s loved us sacrificially, laying down his life for us. He’s shown us patience, gentleness, kindness and has extended grace and forgiveness to us time and time again. He’s helped us in our times of need.

And that’s how we are to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. When we do, it constitutes evidence that our belief in Jesus is authentic. It shows that we are indeed his disciples.

The story is told of a man who had been stranded alone on a desert island for years, when one day a boat came sailing by. Waving frantically, the castaway got the sailor’s attention. The sailor landed his boat on the beach, and climbed out to greet the man. After the two had spoken for a while, the sailor asked the castaway, “Hey, what are those three huts you’ve built?”

The castaway replied, “That first hut is my house, and the next hut, well, I built that for my church.”

“Okay,” said the sailor. “What about the third hut?”

“Oh,” frowned the castaway. “That’s where I *used* to go to church.”

Conflict in churches is all too often an unfortunate reality. It seems this castaway didn’t even need other people around him to experience church conflict! But of course a church with only one person is a contradiction of terms, right? The very word church implies a group of people, and of course, it takes at least two to make a conflict.

---

<sup>12</sup> John 20:31 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> John 13:34-35 (NIV)

I came across a great article called [5 Really Bad Reasons to Leave Your Church](#). Reason number 5 was unresolved conflict. I really appreciate what the author says about this:

Wherever you find the community of the sinning saints you will find conflict... The church is one big family full of characters and misfits. Sometimes sisters argue. Sometimes brothers fight... But despite it all, family is supposed to be the place where you stick together. Even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard...

[The Apostle] Paul addresses a lot of church conflict in his letters. Nowhere do I hear him encouraging believers to bail on one another or move down the road to a different church where it'll be easier. Instead, many of his letters are encouraging and coaching these ragamuffin communities in how to do this very hard and messy thing together. When we leave at first sign of a real conflict, it shortchanges God's best work in our midst. It sidesteps the process of repentance, forgiveness, and grace. It negates the power of the gospel to bring reconciliation where reconciliation might seem impossible. We and those around us miss out on all of it when we just leave... Some of God's best work happens in the mess.

When Jesus calls us to love one another, he calls us to do so in the mess, through the mess, and in spite of the mess—which is just how he loves you and me— in, through and in spite of all of our messiness.

Now this is not the kind of love that we can exert through sheer force of will—although our effort is required. This is a manifestation of love that only Jesus can exert through us as he dwells in our hearts by his Spirit.

And the love we have and show to one another as brothers and sisters isn't just an internal church matter. It's also a matter of mission, because as Jesus said, it is by our love for each other that the world will know that we are his disciples. The love we have one for another attracts outsiders to Jesus, and makes the gospel we declare credible.

This relates to the third mark of true belief that we see in John's gospel:

### **3. Bearing fruit.**

In John 15, Jesus says:

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."<sup>14</sup>

In Hampton Court near London, there is a grapevine. It's about 1,000 years old and has but one root which is at least two feet thick. Some of the branches are 200 feet long. Because of skillful cutting and pruning over the years, the vine produces several tons of grapes annually.

---

<sup>14</sup> John 15:8 (NIV)

Even though some of the smaller branches are far away from the main stem, they still bear lots of fruit because they are joined to the vine and its life flows through them.

The same is true of those who are true believers— true disciples— of Jesus.

In John chapter 15, Jesus likens himself to a vine, and his disciples to branches. When branches are connected to the vine, they bear fruit. A true believer bears fruit because he or she stays attached to Jesus, and his life flows through them. Jesus says:

“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must also remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”<sup>15</sup>

What kind of fruit is Jesus talking about here? First of all there’s **character** fruit. The Apostle Paul calls it the fruit of the Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus who dwells in the heart of every true believer.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>16</sup>

Just like real fruit, character fruit takes time to grow and ripen, but as we branches allow the life of Jesus, the Vine, to flow in and through us—our character will become more and more like his.

Jesus also enables us to bear fruit in **mission**. We bear fruit in mission when we share the love of Jesus with insiders and outsiders, serving others with the gifts and abilities God has given us. Next Sunday, Cornerstone is re-opening for in-person services, and we especially need people to serve as in-person hosts—greeters, ushers and parking lot attendants—and we also need people to serve as hosts in our online chatroom. There are other areas where we need people to serve as well. If you think you can help, visit the webpage that’s on the screen as well as in the chat to find out more.

[www.cornerstonechurch.ca/serve](http://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/serve).

We also bear fruit in mission when we share our faith—our stories of how Jesus has saved and changed us— with those who do not yet know him. If you haven’t checked out our resource called “Ten Best Practices for Sharing Your Faith” yet, I encourage you to do so:

[www.cornerstonechurch.ca/shareyourfaith](http://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/shareyourfaith).

We also bear fruit in mission when nonbelievers are attracted by the transformed life of a Christian community like Cornerstone, and the growing, authentic love we have for God and each other.

Yes, bearing fruit can take time, but having said that, don’t be a bamboo tree. A bamboo tree only bears fruit every 120 years. None of us can afford to wait that long to bear fruit, because none of us has that long. What’s Jesus saying to you this morning about the fruitfulness of your life—both in character and in mission?

As we wind this message down, I’d like you to consider which one of the marks of true belief in Jesus spoke to you the most today. Was it:

---

<sup>15</sup> John 15:4 (NIV)

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 5:22 (NIV)

1. Remaining faithful to Jesus' teaching?
2. Loving one another?
3. Bearing fruit?

Go ahead and type in the chat which mark speaks the most to you right now: 1, 2 or 3?

Whichever one you sense is for you, I don't want you to come away from this message thinking that Jesus is calling you to "get your act together" in that area. Jesus isn't saying, "Get your act together." Instead, his invitation to you is to get to him. Get to Jesus!

If you were paying close attention, you may have noticed that each mark of true belief leads us back to Jesus himself, because only he can produce those marks in our lives. The marks of true belief emerge when our relationship with Jesus is real and vibrant.

At this time, we're going to respond to Jesus' invitation to get to him by celebrating communion, the Lord's Supper.

**Communion** – John 6:48-58