

Kent A. TollaKson July 24th, 2022 - What a disciple is and does?

John8:30-31 & Matt28:19-20

Good morning everyone. It's really good to be with you, both in person and online. I love you people; I love this church and I'm excited to share some aspects of what a disciple IS as well as what a disciple DOES. We will focus on more than one scripture, please turn to John chapter 8 to start.

Before we dive in, please join me in prayer.

Lord I do thank and praise you for joining us together, here or online. Please lead and bless my words. Help us grow in our faith, both inwardly and outwardly, for Your Glory. Use me to bless Your name, advance Your kingdom and I ask for these things within Your power and glory – Amen.

This topic, of being a disciple is HUGE – way too big to cover everything, I will do my best to bring a few things I believe God says about this. My goal, my hope, is that we grow in our faith through celebration of strength and improvement within weakness.

Let's start with – what is a disciple? It's a great question to ask, and Christians should have some answers. Look at John8:30-31 ³⁰*As He (Jesus) was saying these things many believed in Him.* ³¹*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."*

Do you see that there are 2 answers to the question. A disciple is someone who 1. "Believes" an inward affect. And 2. A disciple is someone who "abides" in the teaching of Jesus, an outward affect. Both are required. A person is NOT a

disciple if they believe but don't abide. A person is NOT a disciple if they abide but don't believe! Again, It takes both.

I feel the need to address the statement "so Jesus said to the JEWS who believed" Because I don't want anyone confused, like "why is Jesus ONLY talking to the Jews here?"

Jesus is talking to all believers, and I am confident of that because Paul clarifies the way God sees believers in Gal:3 and in 1Cor12. We are ALL brought into the family of God – Jews, Greeks, Slaves, Free – we are all ONE in Christ! God does not see any believer as anything but a child of God! The only reason we see a reference to Jesus talking to "Jews" is because Jesus was teaching in the Temple at Jerusalem – and only Jews could be in the temple....so that's it – in the temple, Jesus talked to the Jews who believed – and he is talking to us here too.

His teaching was confusing to the scribes and Pharisees. It says in verse 15 right before this that they were trying to understand things according to their own human effort, and not within a spirit led faith. They just don't understand who he is, the proof is in verse 25 when they ask "who are you?". If they believed in Jesus, they would know who He is, accept His teaching, which would lead to understanding!

This brings us back to our verses John8:30-31 – and the two affects – inward belief and outward actions.

Let's talk about the inward effect first. Remember - It's not anything WE do - it's something done for us.

This “believing” is when God has removed our stubborn heart, a heart of stone, and replaces it with a submissive heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). This new heart is given “through faith” – “through believing”, this is not your own doing, remember the truth of Eph2:8-9

“by grace you have been saved, this is NOT your own doing” it’s a gift from God so that you can’t boast about anything you’ve done! Amen! What a beautiful thing – the underserved glorious Grace of our God is!!!

This is the INWARD – effect – something given, something you know, but not outwardly seen....yet.

The outward effects of belief, or faith, ABIDING in the words of Jesus takes all kinds of forms. A few things we should all be doing...

1. Personal Bible reading (I meditate on your word day and night Ps1:2)
2. Personal prayer time (Jesus went off to pray, Matt14:23, Mk1:35, Lk5:16...among others)
3. Gathering (bible study – church and small group - Heb10:25)
 - a. Praying together (Ja5:16...
 - b. Accountability and confession of sin (Ja5:16...confess and pray for each other)
4. Fasting (fasting is something we should do, I’m horrible at doing this one – looking to grow – its something we should do without anyone knowing about – read Matt6:16-18, it focus our prayers and reveals our weaknesses – and God tells us He will reward us for this practice when we go home to be with Him – that’s a huge encouragement to get active with fasting!)
5. Sabbath (God said to work 6 days and on the 7th, rest, rest upon a holy day that God made for man (Mk2:27), and Isaiah 58 talks about sabbath being a

day for taking delight in the Lord and NOT taking delight in our own pleasures! Talk about a failure for me! I thought I was doing well with the sabbath when I enjoyed church and went home to do “nothing” by watching the Packers, taking, and then enjoying movie night! Ouch – I’ve got work to do here people.....in going to guess some of you have work to do also.

These are some of the things called “spiritual disciplines”. Fitting, we get the word disciple out of the word discipline – a disciple is disciplined in following the directions of their teacher – or as Jesus said – if we ABIDE in His words, then we are His disciples.

The Greek word for abide is very, very difficult to pronounce....but the root word - “Meno” – is easy. It means to “to stay, remain, live, dwell; to be in a state that begins and continues, and will not stop. *To abide in Christ* is to follow his example of a life obedient to the will of God” this Greek word also shows up in Mt. 26:38 emphasizing “to continue” in Acts 9:43; emphasizing “to remain” in Rom. 9:11; imploring us “to be permanent”, and in 1 Pet1:23; telling us to persevere, be constant, be steadfast ...– thank you Mr. Bill Mounce and your online Greek dictionary for that information!

I hope it helps to take all those words, stay, remain, live, dwell, continue, be permanent, persevere, do not stop, and summarize them all into one word.... OBEY. A true believer in Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior of their soul through His life, death, and resurrection for the payment of their sin is a person who OBEYS Jesus also. You cannot just believe in Jesus and be saved. Even demons believe in God says Ja2:19, but they don’t obey God. It’s not enough to know how to say yes to the questions, “do you believe in Jesus?” “Do you accept Him as Lord and savior?” and “Will you follow and obey?” Anyone can just say

yes to those questions without actually obeying Jesus, which is not real salvation! I've heard it said this way – a person can't actually lose weight by just believing in diet and exercise. In other words, a friend of yours doesn't walk into church having lost a bunch of weight and you say – wow you look great! You must have changed your diet and began exercising more! Only to have them respond with “changing my diet and doing physical exercise?” no way, I just believe in diet and exercise and the pounds are just melting off me! No, a person loses weight by knowing about weight loss AND acting upon that knowledge! It's the same with our faith, we are only a true disciple (a true Christian) when we believe in Jesus and act like Jesus. Faith without works is no faith at all, it is dead says Ja2:17

And just to be clear – I am NOT saying you DO these things – thus prove to be a believer in Jesus and through the ACCOMPLISHMENT of these things you are saved. We don't do these things to earn love, to earn approval, to earn blessing , We do these things because we HAVE love, we HAVE approval, we HAVE blessing...we HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN! The motivating factor is that ALL the goodness of God is already given to us freely through faith, and the actions we enjoy are a response to move towards our loving savior instead of resisting or walking away. I'm just saying what the Bible says. You don't do these things to get Him to act, you do these things because He has acted for you.

Now let's take a quick moment to cover this....

Maybe there is someone here who has never had these things make sense before. Maybe there are people here who realize they have believed in Jesus but not really followed Jesus. Maybe there are people here who realize they have been trying to follow Jesus to earn His love but see they have not fully believed in

Him. The good news is that Jesus loves you no matter what has been happening! Jesus loves you so much He died to pay for your sin, to pay for all your misunderstandings. Jesus wants everyone to believe and be saved (1Tim2:3-4). Accept Him and begin enjoying life with the help of the Holy Spirit and enjoy the guarantee of eternal life – eternal life! Talk about HOPE. Just say it, I believe, and if you just did – welcome to the family of God! Welcome and please be encouraged to tell someone! It says in Rom10:9 “believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord, and you will be saved!” If anyone has just done this, you should consider baptism tonight – a great way to publicly proclaim that you have died to your old self and in faith have risen into a new life (Rom6:4). You need to enjoy faith inside your heart as well as with other Christians, and baptism tonight is just one way to begin obeying within your believing! Tell someone, tell me – we will enjoy including you in the baptism service tonight!

Alright –back to, What does a disciple do? ABIDE includes multiplying...

MAKING DISCIPLES right! – The second verse for today - Matt 28:19-20 – Go and make disciples, baptize them and teach them all I have commanded!

Like every church in the world, we are a group, a family.....a team that has strengths and weaknesses...

And when I look over our efforts here at East Lincoln, I am extremely encouraged at how active we are as a church family. There are many ways we are being disciples of Jesus who embrace spiritual disciplines and grow. The number of activities and events we host, the number of small groups we have, the participation we enjoy with each other in ministry, the music volunteers, the

youth volunteers, the children's volunteers, the men's and women's ministry activity, the care and prayer support ministries, special events.... It's pretty awesome. But within this second question for today, "what does a disciple do?", I feel called to challenge us to try and make some improvements on Making Disciples.

In listening to an interview of D.A Carson and Tim Keller, Carson commented that the missing piece of discipleship in the church today is that most efforts are more about self-growth and less about church growth. Keller agreed and stated something to the effect that, for a church to take the great commission seriously, everything it does should be about discipleship. When Keller made that statement – I was brought to the desires the elders of East Lincoln.

We are working at bringing discipleship into everything we do. The book "Real Life Discipleship" by Jim Putman has been a big influence. His church uses a 'program' to cultivate disciples who make more disciples (church growth, not just self growth).

The elders could see that East Lincoln already did most of the things brought up in the book, but could also see things to be improved on also. Here are a few examples.

Our small groups are/were self-growth focused, as in, believers gathering to help each other grow. And do not misunderstand me – gathering to help each other grow is WONDERFUL. It's part of being a good team – but think of it this way. Gathering to improve each other's faith is great defensive effort. Its gaining strength to battle the enemy, the offensive Lion seeking to devour you (1Pt5:8). We WANT that "defensive growing in faith" to continue. But what about some

offense? What about trying to score some points ourselves? I hope that makes sense, (scoring points here means making new disciples!) Jim Putman's church has experienced success by having small group leaders mentoring future small group leaders. This "action" ends up producing more small groups which simply increases the number of opportunities for people to gather, which increases the opportunities for new believers to be invited into faith. It's like making more relationship doors that lead into the family of God! This is what Jesus was doing with His 12! Jesus trained 'leaders' to go and make more disciples. Therefore, I now require small group leaders to be active in identifying and including a co-leader. As they do this, the co-leader is brought into running the small group more, and through that we hope to see more and more small groups develop. (It has actually worked – at least one new leader is now active due to being involved in this process! Praise God).

A second example I can share from the book is training and releasing people to do ministry work. With that in mind, I now encourage small groups to be active in doing service work. When a small group does service work, they disciple each other in many ways as they get organized, help prep, gather and do whatever needs to be done. Service activities have proven to increase small group participation and desire to share about Jesus with others! Those increased desires obviously turn into more new disciples!

This is not a perfect system by any means, maybe your recognizing weaknesses in what I am sharing. I know, and we know, that it's not completely figured out. These are just a few examples of how we trying to grow into becoming "disciples who make disciples".

Allow me to point out a few ways we “did” do things in the past that were great defensive actions within the game but lacked the offense. We used to just have the youth leader plan and organize a fun event for students to enjoy and hear the gospel. Now the youth leader is working with a student leadership team. These students are being invited into co-leadership of the ministry. As the team works on ministry planning together – ways to share the gospel will be worked on which will eventually lead to an increase in the opportunities and attempts we make, and I hope, produces new disciples!

We used to have a prayer team plan and host prayer meetings – a great thing – they were beautiful holy huddles of believers getting together and praying for members, the church, the community, the nation, and the world, (wonderful defensive action to fight against the attacks of the enemy) but we recognized it could be more. What if the prayer team became more of a support group to all areas of the church and not just hosting their own meetings? This is harder and more complicated, but it could present more opportunities for members of the church to be discipling each other, and in turn become more active in making disciples themselves. As we continue to dig into a church wide effort to be ‘disciples who make disciples’ (that is where we are trying to go) we continue to see ways that we can improve. I wish the process was more clear, I wouldn’t even care if it were complicated, I just wish it was figured out. But it’s not, real life discipleship is just that – real life. And real life brings complexities and differences as varied as we are. Christ requires us to “teach each other ALL that He commanded” which means we are ALL called into this lifelong process. I heard John Piper say something like ‘discipleship is being looked at to figure out where and how we bring people to Christ and grow everyone in that faith, and this

should be happening in ANY and EVERY situation.” Talk about complicated. But let me encourage us by knocking this down a bit – the overall truth here is that instead of just hosting really wonderful church events that are good things, like prayer meetings, youth events, men’s meetings and the like, let us embrace figuring how those good things can include discipleship work between each other, to motivate and increase active discipleship making within all of our lives. In short – let’s keep trying to be “disciples who make disciples”.

The book Real Life Discipleship is a great resource, Eric has preached on it and has presented these things. But I do recognize some flaws within it that I want to address so we avoid being tripped up by them. **SHOW BIRTH SLIDE** “The book provides a wheel shape to explain growth in faith – up on the screen we can see a person is “birthed” into faith when they hear the gospel, that is true and helpful. **SHOW INFANT SLIDE** Next, a new believer is like an infant who needs lots of basic bible teaching about what is right and wrong. An infant is someone who does not know how to be a Christian but WANTS to be a Christian. (1Pt2:2, 1Cor3:2). **SHOW CHILD SLIDE** here they display more activity in personal bible study as well as Sundays and small groups. They are becoming more obedient to Gods word. This leads to maturing into being a **SHOW YOUNG ADULT SLIDE**. The book identifies a person in this stage becoming active in ministry - leading a small group, volunteering for children’s ministry, youth group, deacon work, music, men’s & women’s ministries, prayer & care support ministries, etc. And the final stage **SHOW PARENT SLIDE** is when a believer is active in sharing the gospel with others and is ‘doing that work on their own.’ All these stages and what’s going on within each of them are often a reality and observable, but I think they present us with a couple of problems.

The first flaw is that this system presents an idea that a person can only effectively share the gospel when they have reached a certain level of training – and this is not biblical. The woman at the well immediately went and told others about Jesus – she didn't have to wait to be taught anything under someone else. Neither did the demon possessed man on the east side of the sea of Galilee. He asked to begin traveling with Jesus, and Jesus said no – just go and tell everyone how much mercy God has shown you.” We do not need to follow a growth in stages system that tells us to wait to engage in certain things only when we have gained a certain amount of information – we are called to go and make disciples period – so go – don't wait. The gaining of biblical knowledge is required, Jesus says “teach each other all I have commanded” so I'm not ignoring that, ALL of us need to keep learning and growing in our knowledge of God, we should just embrace sharing the gospel and inviting others into the family of God, now.

This brings up my second observed flaw. By presenting things in “stages” this system provides a way for people to feel both prideful about being at a certain 'stage' and even blind to how well they are doing with their entire walk. The biggest reason I saw this flaw. Myself. As I read the book and the information about each stage, I was humbled to see that even though I could check a lot of boxes in the young adult and parent stage, I was not doing several things in the infant and child stages. And I have observed, over quite a bit of time now, in many different scenarios – many Christians are the same as me.

Mike Deems talked about these issues a bit the other night at small group with a statement like “If we all could see each other's faith life in a pie chart with good

stuff and bad, we would all be embarrassed about the number and size of sin slices we have”.

If this possibility is ignored there is risk of being blind to where you are really at with your faith. That in turn increases the risk of snuffing out humble compassion for others who struggle with sin. Personally, I know I am infantile in some super basic ways when it comes to fasting, scripture memorization, idolization of hobbies, sabbath, just to name a few. I also feel blessed to recognize that I have a desire that leads me to, more often than not, confess my failures and display Christ to those around me with compassion, patience, kindness, and love. I see both sides within me, Jesus is leading me to do good – and I am still in dire need of improvement. (Lord I need thee – EVERY HOUR I need thee!!!!)

Summary – I’m just saying 1. we shouldn’t wait to share Jesus with others when we believe and 2. we should all recognize flaws within ourselves so that we mature with humbleness and compassion, and 3. We need to praise God for any goodness we see in ourselves.

Can we grow here East Lincoln? Can we continue to be a church that has a wonderful amount of health in our church family embracing personal growth while improving on “making disciples?” We should all have a Paul (some of us do) – a more mature mentor in your life, we should all have a Barnabas – a good friend of similar Christian maturity to share life with (many of us do) – and we should all have a Timothy – a younger Christian to mentor (some of us do). But how many of us are like Fadia – who shared with me how she is working on showing a unbelieving friend the love of Jesus as a way to “win her” as Paul refers to in 1Cor9:22. How many of us are being bold in our faith like Josh Lindner who

was told by a co-worker something like “Church? You go to a church? I’ve got a church on fire tattoo, that’s my church” and Josh responded with something like “I’m sorry man, that’s sad – I’m going to pray for you”....and Josh then prayed for the guy, out load, right then, in front of him. Josh told me the guy didn’t say anything about the prayer. The guys is hard to work with and continues to be. But Josh was faithful to be active in his faith, to be a “doer of the word, and not just a hearer of the word (Jam1:22). Those are not perfect examples, but they are beautiful ones. They show me there is activity to reach out beyond personal growth and see if a few NEW believers might be brought into the family of God through obedience.

I need to improve on being that kind of “fisher of men”! And I want all of us to grow in this area too. I am excited to have expressed this goal and desire as a way to clarify and invite all of you in to figuring out how we can improve on this together – we are a family – we are a team – let’s keep helping build up our personal defenses together – but let’s also go out on to the playing field of life and work at scoring a few believers through sharing Jesus, through showing Jesus and through inviting them to join us! Go Christ Go – Amen.

Let’s Pray.

Benediction

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.—

Romans 15:5–6