

Good morning everyone—my name is Kent Tollakson. I serve in our youth ministry, oversee small groups, and my wife and I provide biblical counseling here at East Lincoln.

It's a privilege to open God's Word with you this morning, and I ask Him to bless our time for His honor and glory.

My faith story has some interesting twists—including coming to Amery in 1994 to teach art—but instead of going into all that, I want to share something I learned about discipleship long before I even knew what that word meant.

While teaching, I took over the Amery middle school wrestling program in 2001. At my first team meeting, I told the team all about the successes I had been a part of in my 9 years of coaching. Conference championships, helping lots of guys get to state along with a few state champions.

The intention was to impress them and send the message “I know what I'm doing – so listen to me.”

Then I rolled out my plan—teaching proven techniques with strict expectations that every wrestler do things exactly the way I taught them.

But the results weren't good.

I didn't understand it at first – I had so many reasons to believe in the things I was teaching! As the wrestlers struggled I often said – “If you would just do it the way I told you – you would win.”

I'm embarrassed to admit how long it took for me to see that they were not failing me....I was failing them.

I had been talking at them instead of talking with them. I hadn't taken the time to learn about who they were—their strengths, their weaknesses, how they were wired.

So I changed.

The next season started with an apology. I committed to working *with* them instead of forcing my approach on them. I began to really watch, listen, and learn—understanding both their strengths and where they needed to grow—and then offering guidance that actually fit *them*.

The results were so fun. My wrestlers gained ability and confidence quickly. We went from being an average team to a dominate one. In the next 5 years I enjoyed 2 undefeated

seasons – a feat the former middle school coach of 30 years told me had never been done before.

I share that because it connects directly to a mission here at East Lincoln: to be disciples who make disciples – which really means to be active in what we call “discipleship”. And I’ve seen similar struggles in discipleship efforts as my coaching experience.

Now, I’ll chat about how Deuteronomy addresses to this—but before we go there, we need to clarify something important—because if we miss this, we might misunderstand everything that follows.

The Bible doesn’t use the word “*discipleship*.” That’s a word we’ve created to describe a biblical idea—and it can feel vague. Sometimes we use it to describe our own walk with Jesus, and sometimes how we help others follow Him.

So instead of starting with a word the Bible doesn’t use, let’s start with one it does.

In the Gospels and Acts, the Bible does use the word *disciple* - and the Greek word for it, (ma-thay-two-oh), is a verb that means BOTH **making disciples** and **teaching disciples**.

We see “making disciples” in places like Acts 14:21, where Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel and people responded through the work of the Holy Spirit and “became” disciples.

But it doesn’t stop there.

In Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus says, “Go and make disciples... baptizing them...”—that’s the beginning—and then, “...teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.”

So this isn’t a moment—it’s a process with two inseparable parts: **bringing people to faith and helping them grow to follow Jesus in every area of life.**

And that growth isn’t primarily a program. Jesus showed us—it’s relational. He didn’t just teach information; He shared His life.

And this is exactly what we see in Deuteronomy 6:4-9—it’s not a program, it’s a lifestyle. Vs 6 - When you study Gods word - so that its “written on your heart” – you display something to those around you – a faithfulness to God. Verse 7 covers a lot of ground - as you gain more knowledge of God – you are to teach your children His word AND teach others by the way you live your daily life. Godliness should be seen in the way you sleep and rise, even how you enter and exit your home (door posts and gateways) (vs8-9). We should be living bibles...

And you can find this same desire *all over* God's Word....

Titus 2:4 older women are to train younger women, 2Timothy 2:2 Paul trained Timothy to train others to train others, Ephesians 6:4 fathers are to train their children, Matthew 28:20 all believers are commanded to teach each other everything Jesus commanded, Hebrews 3:13 all Christians are TO encourage each other to avoid sin - daily, Hebrews 10:24-25 believers should gather together to stir each other up to love and good works, 1Peter 4:10 all Christians are to use their gifts to serve others, Acts 18:24 Priscilla and Aquila explain the way of God more accurately to Apollos.

And that list could keep going....but here's the takeaway: every Christian should be involved in *discipleship* - the whole process: helping people come to faith and helping them grow. —while pursuing Christlike maturity themselves.

Now that matters—but here's why it really matters:

People are lost – they need to be saved. People need Jesus.

So how should we do this? How is East Lincoln doing in this? We recently asked leaders to take an assessment addressing the health of the church, and with the results in hand a leadership committee is now praying over and looking into how we can improve what we do.

And, as prayers are raised and visions shared, for me – one thing is very clear. Which is, things get very complicated when we dig into HOW we should make disciples and be disciples together.

How is this complicated, you may ask?

Well, helping people become believers in Jesus should be happening in ANY and EVERY situation, there is NO SINGLE strategy or LIMIT to the ways a person can hear the good news of Jesus.

And, let's be honest – within this crazy complex number of ways people can become a disciple – we need to include how it's NOT always complex. People get saved all the time by listening to a sermon, reading a bible pamphlet or even listening to a Christian song.....it is awesome how simple becoming a Christian can be.

But there IS more difficulty when it comes to growing as disciples “together”.

And, there is more power in *HOW you do this*. I told you about my coaching to emphasis this.

Now, I hope to help each and every one of us grab a hold of HOW we can engage....

Think about your own life:

Think about your own life. I bet conversations have shaped you more than information, and I bet there has been more than one person who has influenced you.

Information through sermons and presentations are great fertilizer or seeds....but others need to come along and tend what has begun to grow. Watering, weeding, pruning.

And yet, a large portion of the Americas church has reduced following Jesus to; attending, listening, & consuming.

But Jesus didn't say, "Make attenders."

He said:

Make disciples – and teach them. Matthew 28:19-20

And real discipleship isn't formed by sitting in rows—it's forged through **relationships**.

Now this church has a lot of reasons to be encouraged – in fact – the church universal has a lot to be encouraged about. God is moving—especially among younger generations. I don't expect you to know this (some of you do). But did you know that 14–29-year-olds are leading the nation in church attendance? That they have doubled Bible sales in the U.S.? We're in the middle of God is doing some profound things. Especially in teens, young adults and on college campuses. And I don't want us to be sitting back and watching all this happen on YouTube.

I want us to be a church that is so swept up in our devotion to Jesus – that we get involved! I want us to be praying and seeking and asking God – “whatever you're doing in our day do it here!” “I don't want You doing all that out there and not with us too!”.

Now we can't make God do stuff, I understand that – but oh man do I want us to ask and engage!

And this church IS doing a lot. I know many young adults out in this world who are a part of this move of God in America! And a big reason is because of how this church served them!

And we have A LOT of people who volunteer and serve! When we make the list of all the people we need to invite to the volunteer appreciation meal – it's a big list. It's fun to see all the names of the childcare, children's church, Sunday morning teachers, prayer team, book club, craft day, single women's, library, youth group, sound booth, worship team, kitchen crews, women's ministry, (Perry and Travis have been doing a bow making class for

youth) ...and more...! I mean – this is awesome. So many people engaging – and each area brings discipleship into play.

Now, I need to clarify something here - the reason we have **one** volunteer appreciation meal—instead of separate ones by ministry - is that many of the same people serve in more than one place.

Which leads into my next point - we still need volunteers – and Oliver Schwanke – you’ve been waiting for me to say it - ‘*when will Kent pitch involvement in youth ministry*’– so here I go Oliver....we need help with our youth group – next year we will be without the Schwoch, the Deems, my son...just to name a few that have life changes that are taking them out of availability – more on this down the road for sure – talk to me if you’re interested.

But it isn’t only youth group that still has need. We could use more help in childcare and children’s church. We’re still without a men’s ministry coordinator. The high-rise ministry has had weeks when they needed more support. We should have more men meeting in small groups. And people often ask if there is an older couples Bible study – the answer is NO, and the reason is simple – couples want a group – but don’t want to lead a group. So as you can see—the harvest is plentiful, and even with a wonderfully healthy number of volunteers, more workers would be a blessing.

So why don’t more people step in?...well that’s where it gets interesting. Each family, each couple, each person attending this church has different things going on in life. Which creates a complex number of reasons for not volunteering.

And yet, as Eric preached a few weeks back.... we often give more time and energy to our own priorities than to God’s.

So why is that? Why do our hearts drift so easily—so prone to wander, so prone to leave the God we love?

Allow me to bring up 2 verses I didn’t have Harlon read for us....Deuteronomy 6:1-2

6 *“These commands, decrees, and regulations the Lord your God commanded Moses to teach. You must obey them....*

...AND, you, your children and grandchildren must FEAR the Lord your God as long as you live. ...

We don’t fear Him. If we literally saw God – we would fall down in absolute terror of how awesome and powerful He is.

And, within our reverent fear – God would open our eyes to His great love for us – and the result would be to worship Him with everything we have...everything else would fade away and doing what He asked would be our only desire.

I've got 3 points to close:

Point 1: Discipleship starts with a reverent fear of God, fueled by His great love for us.

This starts with the greatest commandment: Deut 6:5, repeated by Jesus (Mk12:30)
Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

This isn't casual.

This isn't partial.

This is **everything**.

POINT 2: = HOW we are to display our love for Him.

Discipleship Flows from God's love for us...into Loving others.

Jesus clarified HOW with the second greatest commandment,
"love your neighbor as yourself" Mark 12:31.

Love your neighbor....?

Who is your neighbor!? Married couples – your closest neighbor is your spouse, if you have kids – their next. Then comes family members – then comes church family – and then...comes everyone else. The order....love:

Married couples: the order is love God, then your spouse, then your kids, then family members, then church family, then the world.

Single people – the order is...love

Single people: the order is love God, then family, then church family, then the world.

I'm not claiming I have developed a perfect order here – but I do think it's solid.

Within those relationships is where discipleship happens—not through better programs, but through intentional, everyday investment in people.

Discipleship is not a moment—it's a way of life.

You cannot separate loving God from loving people. And you cannot make disciples without loving people deeply.

That's what I learned in coaching.

Knowledge alone didn't help my wrestlers. But when I took time to understand and invest in them personally, everything changed.

The same is true spiritually.

People don't grow because you impress them with what you know. They grow when your love for God leads you to genuinely invest in them.

POINT 3: Discipleship Is Not Optional—It's Our Command.

Jesus' final words before ascending:

Matthew 28:19-20

“Go and make disciples...and teach them”

This isn't being a consumer, or attender – it's being an intentional disciple obeying the Lord.

And I won't even try to talk about how any of you should start an older couples small group, or begin attending men's studies, or become a men's ministry director. Those situations require a commitment of time and energy you may not have.

But. Can I point out that this church has put a lot of time and effort into organizing our efforts as well as we can to enable disciples to make and grow disciples.

And, I hope many of you see the truth in this. As busy as you may be, as time strapped as most of us are. Some of the areas that have needs right now (childcare, children's church, youth group) take place on Sundays and Wednesdays. Sundays are VERY built into availability! If you regularly come to church – you can (and probably should) volunteer in areas of need. Especially if you are a parent. The blessing you gain by volunteering as a parent are many – you gain relationship with more of the church, you help kids grow, you grow yourself, and your kids see you “doing Gods word” not just saying Gods word (James 1:22-25).

Wednesday nights may be a bit more challenging – I get it. But again. If you are a single person or a parent of youth group kids. You should (probably) volunteer. The type of discipleship ministry that comes with being involved in youth ministry is IN YOUR FACE. You meet with and talk with young people who are a massive mix of: needing Jesus, being curious about Jesus, wanting to learn about Jesus – it's a perfect storm for discipleship.

And so is leading a small group! When you lead a gathering of disciples you engage in all the needing and seeking and learning – for others and yourself.

And I should say, to volunteer and lead - there is a process – we have an application, we get references, we get your testimony – as in - we don't just have anyone teach. You need to be someone safe, a believer, and have the right temperament. But honestly. We should not have needs in these areas – we should have waiting lists!

The Problem Today is a common view of being a devoted Christian means going to church over 50% of the time.

We aren't making disciples and helping them grow as much as we could.

Think back to your journey of faith. I'm willing to bet that you have big pieces of your faith puzzle fall into place within

Think back to your journey of faith. I'm willing to bet that you have had big pieces of your faith puzzle fall into place within real conversations about faith, small group settings, and real-life relationships.

A Challenge for many of us....

A challenge for many of us is to invite someone into your life, get involved with church ministries, and have a real conversation about faith with someone. Start small, but start intentionally.

Ask:

Ask, "How can I grow in my walk with Jesus?" and "Pray and ask: who is God calling me to invest in?"

Final Encouragement

God does not command you to disciple everyone.

But He *is* commanding you to make disciples in the ways you can, and to disciple **someone**.

Let's not be a church sitting on the sidelines with popcorn cheering as God continues to move in the next generation. Let's join what He is doing. Let's be followers of Jesus who embraces him as Lord, savior AND treasure so much so that we can't help but jump in.

For those of you who are investing – helping – leading and volunteering! Be encouraged, it's hard to stay committed, to keep showing up and listening, supporting and serving. But it's having an effect – even if we can't always see it.

For those of you who have been sitting back – get involved. Volunteer if you can – start a small group if you can – or make whatever adjustments you need to begin joining in

gathering with at least one – if not more – to engage in making disciples or being a disciple growing with other disciples. Amen?

Lets Pray.

Closing Prayer (Benediction)

“Lord,

You have commanded us in **Deuteronomy 6:5**
to love You with all our heart, soul, and strength.

You have commanded us in **Mark 12:31**
to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And You have commanded us in **Matthew 28:19**
to make disciples everywhere and help them grow.

So God, make us people who love you deeply, love others intentionally, and live on mission.

Let our homes, our tables, and our lives
be places where disciples are made.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

