

Christian Discipleship: The Means and End of Great Commission Ministry

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 January 2023

Preacher: Jeff Jackson

[0 : 00] Well, we finished, by God's wonderful grace, the book of Jonah last week. That was a ride, wasn't it?

I don't know if you had ever sat through a series of sermons from the book of Jonah, but I had never preached through that book before, and it was a delight for me. And I loved every moment of it, even though I saw Jonah in a little bit of a new light.

I'd read the book many times, but I didn't know he was that much of a brat. He reminded me of me and how we all need Jesus. I want to invite you to turn to the book of 1 Thessalonians for this morning.

My plan over the next today and the next Sunday or two is to bring you some messages that I want to do by way of reminder to you, things that I think you know and have heard before but want to remind you about.

Suzanne and I are planning to take a trip at the end of the month down to Georgia where I'm from to see my mom as she continues to try to recover from the illnesses that have plagued her of late.

[1 : 13] So I'll be out a Sunday, but a couple of sermons before then and then another one when I get back and then we'll jump into a new book of the Bible together. The title of my message is Christian Discipleship, the means and the end of Great Commission ministry.

Now, before we read from 1 Thessalonians, you can hold your finger there. I'll actually begin in Matthew where we find what we call or refer to the Great Commission from the Lord Jesus Christ right before He ascended into the heavens.

The last charge, excuse me, or commission that He gave His disciples comes in this section of Scripture. Matthew 28, and we'll just read from verse 19 and 20.

Go therefore, Jesus said, go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. And making disciples is the primary verb there.

That's the action. That's the emphasis of the text. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.

[2 : 33] And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age, teaching them to obey. Make disciples and teach them to obey. Help them to learn what it means to follow me.

And then back over to Thessalonians. Let me say a number of things here to walk us into the topic for this morning. Christian discipleship is the privilege and the responsibility of every Christian believer, every Christian, every person who puts their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and seeks to walk with Him and trust Him for the forgiveness of their sins.

That comes by way of your commission as a believer in Matthew 28, what we just read. But I realize this. When I say the word discipleship, I understand that a number of different things could come to your mind.

So I'll just ask you rhetorically this morning. When I use the word discipleship, what comes to your mind? What immediately jumps into your mind? Just think about that. It's a word and concept used almost exclusively in Christian circles.

Circles, isn't it? All right, think of this. For those of you who work in a secular environment, most of us do, most of you do. When was the last time you engaged in conversation with some of your secular friends and co-workers and the word discipleship was used?

[4 : 05] Right. It's kind of like the word fellowship. What was the last time you used the word fellowship out in the world to talk to your unsaved friends or family members and you talked about all the sweet fellowship that we have as a family?

Probably not. Discipleship and fellowship. These are words that we almost, almost see exclusively used in Christian circles. That's the point. It's not a word or idea you deal with much beyond local church life.

Now, why is that? It's a very specific kind of friendship relationship. Very specific kind.

Now, think about this purpose of Grace Church Williamsburg. I'm not responsible. Greg and I are not responsible for what other churches in our community do and how they purpose themselves.

We're responsible as shepherds for here. So, think about what we do here. Let me put this up on the screen for you so that you can follow along with me. We are to proclaim Jesus in order to make disciples.

[5 : 17] That's how that happens. Who follow Jesus through, notice these things, a growing willingness to warn one another.

That's admonition, admonish. To warn one another away from sin. To teach one another how to live in the gentleness of wisdom.

That would be God's wisdom. And to love one another according to the grace of God. Now, we could add others to that, other ideas to that.

But those three things kind of encapsulate what we are talking about when we think about discipleship happening in a local church environment among brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here at Grace Church Williamsburg, that's what we try to emphasize. Now, I'd like to just make four statements that move into the theme of discipleship to help us kind of grasp the gist of what I want to put forward to you today.

[6 : 18] So right on the front end, I'm kind of letting it all hang out, as it were. We're talking about what this topic is in the sight of the Lord, what it means to God. And I'm going to say it in maybe four different ways.

And maybe one of these ways will be the way you lock on to. And you hold on to that through the message. What is this idea about you being commissioned by Jesus to be, listen to this, a disciple maker?

And are you? Are you a discipler? Are you taking the commission from your Lord seriously and ordering and purposing your life in order to fulfill that commission of seeing people come to Christ and then grow up into his likeness?

That's the charge. And it's not just a pastoral thing. I'm going to show you that this morning. It's not just something that the two of us, Greg and I, are supposed to do. This is your mandate.

So let me say it in several different ways. The first one is this. Christian discipleship is the investment. So that's the key word. Of your life in Christ in someone else's life in Christ.

[7 : 31] You use your spiritual bank account to make a deposit into another Christian's spiritual bank account.

That's the investment. That's the transaction. All right. How about another one? Christian discipleship involves teaching Christians to obey what God is teaching us about living to worship, please, and enjoy him.

Teaching them to observe, teaching them to obey, Jesus said. That's Christian discipleship. You don't have to be a seminary graduate or the graduate of a Christian college or have any kind of necessary formal training in settings like that to fulfill this commission.

You just need to be a follower of the Lord. And so what this is, is it's bringing you alongside of other people in order to teach them what God's teaching you. It could be as simple as that.

What has God taught you this week? And could you find another Christian that you could share that with and invest? And they may say to you, yes, yes, the Lord was actually teaching me something similar a few months ago.

[8 : 53] And you can talk about that and build each other up in that. Or that person may say, you know, I never thought of that like that from that passage. What else did the Lord? That kind of thing.

So it can be formal instruction that you're receiving right now, or it can be informal in the everyday interactions of your life as you come across other believers.

Now, I want to make a quick point before I move to the next one. Remember that Christian discipleship happens among Christians. You cannot disciple unbelievers. What do we do with unbelievers?

Evangelize them. What does it mean to evangelize an unbeliever? It's to share the love of Jesus with them by appealing them to come to Christ and trust Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and trust Jesus alone for that.

Only Christ, only Christ can forgive their sins and make them right with the Father. So we appeal to them in those ways. But for Christians, we're trying to help each other become more and more Christ-like in the way that we live.

[10 : 01] The next one. Christian discipleship is the relationship between two or more Christians where God works His blessings of grace in and through your life to instruct, there's that teaching aspect again, and strengthen other believers in their relationship with Christ.

Do you see a common theme happening here? I hope you do. I hope you're hearing a common theme run through this because that's the message for this morning. And then finally, this one. Christian discipleship is a God-ordained relationship of growing in the grace and knowledge, the favor and knowledge of Jesus Christ, of becoming like Jesus together.

You're becoming more and more like your Savior together. So this is not an individual sport necessarily. All right, this is a group activity.

Discipleship draws other people into your life, and that's an intentional thing on your part. We'll talk about that toward the end of my message. Now, what I'd like to do this morning is instruct about three simple characteristics of Christian discipleship.

I call them simple because I think most of you are going to immediately relate to these. You've heard these before, but I hope that you'll stay tuned in and think carefully about how the Holy Spirit wants to challenge you this morning in this regard.

[11 : 38] My prayerful intention is to inform, affirm, and encourage you in a lifestyle. That's the key. A lifestyle, a relationship lifestyle of investing in the spiritual growth of one another.

You say, Jeff, now are you preaching this because you're not seeing that happening among us? Are you getting on us here? No, I'm not. I'll let you know when I get on you. There won't be any doubt about that.

I'll say it on the front end. And that will be an admonishment, a warning, folks, please. This is what's going on. This is the tenor that Greg and I are picking up on and we need to shift.

And we're going to do that together. I'll say things like that. No, I'm not preaching this because I'm getting on to you. I want to encourage you. I'm preaching this because I want to do this in the way of a reminder.

I want to always keep this in front of us. As Greg and I teach and preach and minister, we want to hold out the reality that discipleship is all about becoming more like Jesus together.

[12 : 39] That's the issue. And I'll say that and say that through the message this morning. So this is a lifestyle of investing in each other. Now we're at 1 Thessalonians 5.

And let me read from verse 11 down through verse 22. Paul says, See, that's the heart that I have this morning.

I see you doing this and I want to continue to encourage you in this direction. Keep going. Add more still. Excel still more. But we request of you, brethren, in verse 12, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.

That would be your pastors. And that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. Now he goes on.

We urge you, brothers, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

[13 : 57] Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything, give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Boy, we don't have to guess about God's will there, do we?

Do not quench the Spirit. That would be the Holy Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully.

Hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Again, folks, the point for this morning, we want to help you become more like Jesus and to bring others with you in that process.

Become more like the Lord Jesus and grab a person or two and bring them with you as you do that and walk together in that reality. So the first thing that I'll highlight for this morning then will be Christian discipleship is relational.

We just can't get away from that. It's all in the text. From verse 11, and we're jumping, I realize, right into the, toward the end of this letter, and Paul has said a number of things to these Christians and the therefore kind of clues us into that.

[15 : 15] Therefore, encourage one another. And he's saying this because he's trying to straighten them out in terms of when Jesus is coming back. And yes, that's imminent, but he wanted them to understand it had not already happened.

They didn't miss Jesus returning again. And so in the light of that reality, continue to live and prosper in the grace of God as they serve one another.

So he comes to verse 11. Therefore, in light of that truth, encourage one another and build up one another just as you also are doing.

Now, right out of the gate, we have this word, parakaleo. It means to encourage, to strengthen, comfort, exhort. In chapter 4, verse 18, therefore, comfort one another, parakaleo, one another, with these words.

Paul is very concerned that Christians within the church at Thessalonica are making pains and labors to encourage one another with the words of the Lord, comfort, to speak the truth in love to each other as he put it to the Ephesian church in Ephesians chapter 4.

[16 : 31] Comfort one another. That's the idea. This isn't, now, this is not positive self-image talk. This is not self-help talk.

It has a specific aim. It is to comfort and strengthen in the truth of the Lord for godly living.

That's why he says this in verse 18 of chapter 4. Comfort one another with these words. What words? The words of the Lord. The truth. So this is your personal investment of coming alongside of someone in the church family to provide biblical encouragement in that person's walk with Jesus.

Doesn't have to mean that you've seen sin in their life or you suspect sin in their life. This is just you taking opportunity to come alongside another Christian and invest in them.

Why? Why would you do that? Well, number one, because Jesus says we're to do that. That'll be enough right there. But the Bible moves on and says because you need to learn to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil together.

[17 : 42] Don't be a lone ranger. Again, Christianity's not an individual sport, is it? Now, this is all reinforced by our next word that he uses.

Therefore, encourage, look at this, one another. One another. It's a reciprocal action. It's the idea, then, of mutual encouragement.

It goes both ways, from you to them and from them to you. It's one to another spiritual upbuilding. Spiritual upbuilding. Now, there are about 45 or so of these one another's in the New Testament, and each of them is given within the context of, catch this, no surprise, the local church.

The local church. These one another's happen as we gather together as the local church, as we minister together as the local church, as we live our lives together as God's people.

These one another's are to characterize the environment that we live in together. These one another's are to nurture our hearts together.

[18 : 55] Now, folks, you will not find this in the world. The world has an opposite paradigm for what we're explaining in Scripture today.

And as we saw last Wednesday night, if you were here for that study, one of the things that we pointed out in the study was that demons believe and want to come in and exploit the relationships that we have together because they have the idea that the only way for a relationship to work is to conquer it.

It's a very selfish, self-centered approach to relationships. They believe there's no way for you to experience an up-building or a, how did they put it, Greg?

A improvement of self unless you are able to suck the other self dry. That's the demonic approach.

It's very self-centered. So the only way that I can gain is if you lose. Derek, I'll do this with my brother here. For me to get into Derek's life and for my life to improve, his has to lessen.

[20 : 08] I have to take from him in order to improve myself. That's, that's the world, isn't it? You step on whatever you have to step on and whoever you have to step on to get what you need.

And if you are nice to him, you always have an agenda. You got one arm around him and the knife in this hand doing this. Right? That's not what the word says.

We have a very, very different view of relationships. The demons and Satan do not understand the cross. They do not understand the power of Jesus coming to die for us when we were helpless and in our greatest need as sinners.

That Jesus died for sinners, not cleaned up people. They don't get that. So that whole model, that whole paradigm of Jesus dying for the helpless and the benefit, the mutual benefit that comes from relationship with Christ.

We just said, we bless the Lord. That's mutual. We're giving something back as Jesus has ministered to us. They don't get that. And it's a win-win.

[21 : 15] It's not a win-lose. Nobody has to lose. So these one-anothers are all couched within the framework of the local church. I want to give you a few examples to guide your thinking about this personal investment as it's scattered throughout the New Testament.

And we'll just do a few books. We're not going to hit them all. I told you, there's 45 or so of these. Go to Galatians, if you would. We'll start right at the beginning here. Galatians 5.13.

For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.

Here it comes. But through love, serve one another. There's one. Through love, serve one another. Okay, we'll just keep going.

I just want you to see them. Ephesians 4.2. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.

[22 : 13] There's love again. Show tolerance for one another. Then in Philippians 2.3.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves.

Do you have that kind of regard for one another? You and I are to gather together in this venture and we're not supposed to walk in the door thinking in terms of or allowing ourselves to drift into terms of what's in it for me.

We are to have regard for one another according to this particular verse, have regard for one another in the sense of you are more important than me.

I want your best interest to be served above my own. Now, let me ask you, let's stop right there. That's very challenging. Jeff, are you sure that, yeah, I'm absolutely positive.

[23 : 18] Where do we go to see that modeled for us in a supreme way? Sure. This is, this is why this symbol's up here. By the way, you notice there's no figure on this, right?

Why isn't there a figure on this cross? Yeah, he's not there anymore, is he? Where is he? And he's living in us. All right. Take a little, that was a teaching moment right there, so I just took it.

So regard, regard for one another as being more important than you are. I have your greater interests in mind, even beyond my own. I, I, and that's, look now folks, that's at the forefront of my mind.

That isn't somewhere back here and I've got to really work to pull it up. I'm learning to live like Jesus and think about other people in terms of, I want to make sure that your interests are served even before my own gets served.

Even if mine don't get served, I want to make sure yours are. Can you imagine a world like that? Let me tell you, that's, that's heaven.

[24 : 24] Now we're not going to have that until we get to heaven, but that's what we're working toward and, and there is a little bit of a slice of that and a feel for that here now, right now, as you look to the best interests of each other and minister to each other through the week like that.

That's beautiful. Colossians, the book of Colossians, I'll just give you a couple more. And if you look at verse 13 with me in chapter 3, Colossians 3, 13, bearing with one another and forgiving each other.

Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Bearing with one another, having a strong and vibrant and robust patience and enduring spirit with each other.

And then, going beyond that and not just tolerating each other, but forgiving each other from the heart, just as God has forgiven you.

And letting that shine through. These one another's are powerful, aren't they? All right, let me give you one more here or a double whammy from one book. It's Hebrews. Go toward the back of the Bible.

[25 : 49] In Hebrews, chapter 3. And if you'll look at verse 13.

But encourage one another. See, there it is again. That's our same word, *parakaleo*. But encourage one another day after day as long as it is still called today so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Boy, that's a... You say, Jeff, that's a threat in the church to individual Christians? Yes. You can be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. And then you check out.

The scriptures aren't important anymore. Coming to church isn't important anymore. The things of God. You start doubting your salvation. Am I even saved? That would be a legitimate doubt in your mind at that point.

So we're to encourage one another day after day as long as it is called today. And then over in Hebrews, chapter 10. And this is the last one. Hebrews, chapter 10.

[27 : 01] Beginning in verse 24. You're probably very familiar with this. And let us consider how to stimulate one another.

Toward what goal? To love and good deeds. To stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

And all the more as you see the day drawing near. Folks, time is precious. The day of Christ's return is drawing near. So this passage of scripture here in Hebrews, chapter 10, helps us understand the great priority that God puts on our gathering together in a faithful way and telling us gather together in a primary purpose of encouraging one another and stimulating one another to love and good deeds.

Come to church not so much for what you think you're going to get, but for the opportunity that you have to be a blessing to someone else and intentionally form your life for that purpose.

Come to church for that. Now you know as well as I do as you and I have that attitude in our hearts and begin to minister like that, invariably we receive a blessing, don't we?

[28 : 26] Absolutely. That mutual encouragement is a wonderful thing, and it comes back to us. It isn't karma, it's Bible. All right, let me go to this next one real quickly because we're still talking about what Paul's saying here in 1 Thessalonians 5.11.

Look at this next word. Oh my goodness, what a word. *Oikodemeo*. It means to build up and the pictorial metaphor here is that of a house.

So to restore or to repair, to renovate. So in a metaphorical sense, it takes on the idea of building up someone in Christian growth, building up, restoring, restoration in Christian growth.

Therefore, encourage, *parakaleo*, one another and build up one another just as you also are doing.

Continue to do that. Now, as we come to verses 12 and 13, we see that this is speaking to the Christians here in Thessalonica about regard for their pastors, the men who are ministering to them as their shepherds.

[29 : 39] And he says this, we request of you brothers that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction. We want you to esteem them very highly in love.

Now, all of that is said about these pastors notice because because of their work. What's he talking about? This is the relationship that pastors have to discipleship.

We are equipping you going back to Ephesians 4 again when I referenced a minute ago. We are equipping you for the work of ministry. Greg and I aren't supposed to do all the work of the church.

We're the body of believers. We're supposed to equip you to do that. And one of the primary ways that we do that is on Sunday morning. What we're doing right now is discipleship.

You're being instructed in the Lord about how to minister to the Lord even as you minister to each other. And then as we take that love out into our workaday world and share that love of Jesus with others in practical ways.

[30 : 43] So there's, there's, Paul is saying in this regard, look, be an encouragement to your pastors because they are in the service of encouraging you. So have a high regard for them in that work.

Esteem them very highly as they engage in the work of instructing you and encouraging you in how to encourage each other in Christ. Do you see that mutuality coming through again?

Now that's all I'll say about that because this isn't a sermon on how to appreciate your pastors. Although I've got that one in my hopper. All right, so let's look at verse 14 then.

We urge you, brothers, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Now, months and months ago, we went through some training here that introduced you to much of the heartbeat of biblical counseling.

I think I, I think Greg, I had just finished that degree and so Greg and I thought, all right, let's take some of what I've been learning over the last four years and give them the heartbeat of what biblical counseling because we want to establish a biblical counseling ministry here at our church.

[31 : 51] We would love to raise up a counseling center here and train more people. That's one of our spiritual goals here. So you may remember if you came to that training, we hit this verse really hard.

We really camped out here and spent some time on this verse. Urge here, we urge you in the New American Standard translation is this. Urge is the same word, parakaleo, just used in a different way.

Same way he uses it in 418 and 511 and now two times, actually twice in verse 14. So friends, it seems the emphasis here would be Paul urging, urging these Christians.

So this is, this is a very deep kind of appeal. That's the urge idea. He's urging these Christians by instructing them to come alongside each other in the following specific ways.

Now I've borrowed these from Dr. John MacArthur talking about five types of struggling sheep. This is where he takes this in verse 14.

[32 : 58] Five types of struggling sheep. Another way to think about it is sinful behavior in the body, in the flock, which relates to, relates to living and caring for each other.

So we want to minister caring involvement to each other as we encounter each other in these different ways. People in our congregation who are at different seasons of life and possibly experiencing some of this.

The first one that we want to deal with in verse 14 is we want to urge wayward disciples. Urge wayward disciples.

In what way? We want to admonish them. That's what it says. We urge you, brothers, admonish the unruly. Admonish is to warn away from sin and its consequences.

It's the same word that's used in verse 12. But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you.

[34 : 07] Charge over you in the Lord and instruction. For instruction, in verse 12, is the word to center on. Put people in the right frame of mind.

Help them to understand biblical truth. This is the way that we counter the lies of the world and the lies of Satan with each other. So we admonish these people.

We warn them away. Another way to say it might be this. We talk biblical sense into each other. Talk biblical sense into each other.

then he says this, unruly. Admonish the unruly. The unruly are the undisciplined and disorderly. And we're mainly talking about people who've come to a place in their spiritual life where they're not showing spiritual discipline.

They're not showing self-control. Things have gotten out of kilter. So they're a little, they're a bit wayward. They've walked away from those things which help us help each other to become more like Jesus.

[35 : 16] It's almost like they took their eye off the ball. They're not focused anymore or as much as they used to be on becoming Christ-like. So we're not hammering people with rules and regulations and being legalistic and trying to get into your business.

This is about sharing life and saying, no, I'm concerned that you continue to be conformed to Jesus in the way that you speak and live and the way that you conduct yourself.

You know? Greg and I always appreciate so much your wonderful willingness to be accountable and make things a joy for us in our ministry.

When you're going to be away from the church for whatever reasons, then you let us know. Because, look, there's no secret. If you're not here, we notice.

There's not 600 people in this room. We're a small family and we notice. That noticing is concern. It's not head-thumping. It's concern.

[36 : 24] Maybe you're just sick. You know? We get that. That happens. Maybe it's this. Maybe it's that. But for whatever reason, we always appreciate when you let us know that. Because if we see that you're out this time and then this one and then this one, some flags go up, right?

So we want to come get you and say, hey, what's going on? What's happening? How can we help? What we want to make sure of is you haven't taken your eyes off the ball, as it were.

Christ. All right. So where are we? Where was I at? You see, I'm walking away a lot. This is all unscripted. Yes, disorderly.

So as among soldiers, that's the metaphor here, as among soldiers who are out of rank. They're out of rank. They're not lined up properly. That's the idea behind this.

So it's irregular. It's deviating from the prescribed order of things. And, you know, that's... To go a little stronger and what I was reading did, it's to be insubordinate and it can't even go to the point of being self-willed.

[37 : 36] So you're insubordinate. You're self-willed in what you're doing. That goes against this whole concept of encourage one another and mutually benefiting each other.

If you're self-willed and undisciplined and unruly and insubordinate, it's going to be hard for that mutuality to happen, isn't it? It's not. That's the point.

So this can apply to those who are just outright rebellious. God help us. As well as to those who are more passive through apathy and indolence.

It's a hard thing. All right, let's move to the next one. Relating to worried disciples. This can happen, folks. We all go through seasons of life in our walk with the Lord where this can happen.

He says this. Urge you, brothers, admonish the unruly. Encourage the faint-hearted. Encourage. Again, console.

[38 : 35] Comfort. Help to calm. This is, again, the appeal to come alongside of one another. Come alongside. And then here, Paul ties it to this word.

Faint-hearted. Faint-hearted. It's prone to fear, worry, doubt, discouragement. Now, you know, some people just seem to be a bit predisposed to that kind of approach to the issues of life.

And as life heats up, you'll see that kind of rise in them. Now, we need to forbear with those folks and be patient and kind. And we need to minister the gospel in their lives and truth to them.

And put our arms around each other in those seasons of life where that might get jacked up a bit. People will worry. And they can become faint-hearted.

So these are people that are prone to discouragement. They're tied up in mental and emotional knots from fear and forecasting. Those two things work hand-in-glove with each other.

[39 : 43] Fear and forecasting. What might happen? What could happen? And there are ways for us to minister the truth of God in love to help people like that through those seasons and to help prepare them better to face the next season that they'll be in when that happens so that it doesn't have that much of a negative impact on them.

So we help them learn how to be proactive about that. Not live as a victim, quote-unquote, of it. We don't want victimology.

We want to do something about that and we can because of the scriptures. Interesting phenomenon. Let me mention this before I move on. Can occur within a spiritually maturing church family which is what we're being told to encourage one another to do.

Grow in grace together. Grow in the Lord together. Great. I think that's happening here at our church. But as we grow in grace together we become more and more spiritually focused and faithful to kingdom living together.

You say, what's wrong with that? Nothing. That's beautiful. Let me say that again. As we grow in grace together we become more spiritually focused and more spiritually faithful to kingdom living together.

[41 : 02] Living for the kingdom of God together. Now, here's the thing. The atmosphere and culture of our church begins then at that point to take on a feel of spiritual maturity so that it kind of feels like people here take their faith seriously.

And if you come to grace and you sit down here as a visitor and maybe you'll start to sense it right off the bat by perhaps the songs we sing or the way we pray or maybe your interactions with some of the people give you the impression that wow these people are serious about their faith.

And that is all good. That's all very good. We are becoming increasingly sober minded about our walk with the Lord and the things that are important to God.

We're not trivial and silly about the things of the Lord. That's great. Very good. But now here's the thing. For people maybe visiting our church this could be potentially be wonderfully refreshing.

We've experienced that with folks. But folks it can also be a bit intimidating. If you're not used to a church with a focus like that and a culture like that it can be a little disconcerting.

[42 : 24] You know you might walk in and feel this way. You might go lands in I don't know if we can go there these people are so serious about their faith and I'm just compared to them I feel like a baby Christian.

You know what I'm saying? This is exactly what Suzanne and I experienced when we went out to Grace Community Church John MacArthur's church and we joined there and I started in the seminary.

Some of you have heard this story. Three months in we've been going to church there for three months and every service we left on Sunday we were weeping.

Part of it was the absolute ecstatic joy that we felt in being swept up in the worship and the sober mindedness and then we would talk to people and engage with people and oh then we would go to Sunday school right and the people in the Sunday school there were 300 people in that Sunday school class alone.

It was like going to a church four times the size of us kind of thing and I remember Suzanne saying to me Jeff I feel like a baby Christian around these people.

[43 : 40] Do you know why that happened? Because we had never been around a church culture like that before. We'd been in some decent churches and all it's not a slam on all that but we had never been in a church where they had cultivated that culture for that amount of time at that level of depth.

And it was amazing and beautiful. Now here's what it did to us. While it intimidated us and we know that feeling it also brought us to the place where we understood something had happened.

We were starving to death for that and we didn't even know it. We didn't even know it. But when it started happening we were like lands in where has this been? And you say Jeff well what did they do?

Well I'll tell you what they didn't do. There were no fog lamps and smoke. No mirrors. There wasn't a praise band up here going like that. You didn't have to do this.

There was none of that. That's not what captured us. They sang the songs of the Lord. They praised God in their songs. And John MacArthur got up and he doesn't even do this.

[44 : 50] He doesn't even do this. He's a talking head. He just stands behind the pulpit and the most you'll get from him is. But he preaches the gospel and we verse by verse.

That's what did it. Then we went to the Bible studies and it was more of the same. And then this people in the church people who didn't even know us people who had just met us started to say hey why don't you guys come over on Tuesday night.

We're having a Bible study at the house and we've got some people from our fellowship group that are coming over. Would you guys come over? And people person after person started doing that with us.

And so a church of 10,000 people felt like a church of 50. And they loved us in the Lord and they did not let the fact that we felt like we had nothing to offer get in the way of them loving us in Christ.

And we knew when we left Grace Church I told her I want a pastor like that. I want to pastor other people like I was pastored while we were there. I just want to do it the way they did it.

[45 : 58] What a beautiful experience. And we grew in the Lord folks. We grew in the Lord. So I'm just trying to say we need to realize what it's like for other people as they come in.

The one another's of our faith being lived out in gracious acts of kindness and care. that helps soften the seriousness of our commitment to truth so that we can speak live and minister the truth and love.

We've heard people say this about Dr. MacArthur in his ministry behind the pulpit. Oh we're scared to death of that guy. He's in the pulpit.

He's so serious. And then you meet John. The first time we met him this is all I'm sorry I was just talking about John. I love him to death and he had a big influence on us.

The first time we met him he sits on the front row and we knew that. So I told her I said we got to run. We're going to get down there and we're going to sit right behind him. Was this on a Sunday night?

[47 : 03] So we sat down and we knew they had a time of meeting and greeting and so I was just waiting. And so everybody stood up and this is what he did. He turns around and he sticks his hand out and he goes hi I'm John.

How you doing? And I was like I know who you are man. Come on. You're my hero. And from that on I saw him. He came and spoke at the chapels.

He came and did this and we saw him in this setting and that setting. And I was like my goodness what a humble gracious sweet-hearted man. But in the pulpit it's it's all thus saith the Lord.

Well of course. That's a that's a man being a prophet as it were proclaiming God's word and commanding God's people.

That's preaching. Now I'm saying that happens here at Grace. It happens every time we gather to teach God's word. We take God's word seriously. Now what helps soften some of that approach where people could get the impression whoa.

[48 : 09] The one another's. The one another's. As we reach out to one another and bear with one another. Bear each other's burdens. See the mix. So we have the public ministry of the word going on.

We have the personal ministry of the word as you interact with God in your own personal devotionals and time as a family. And then we have the private ministry of the word as we minister that word in a counseling situation.

And help people grow in grace. And all that's going on to help this be effective. So it's not just this. It's all of it.

All right. Now this one we'll move on relating to weak disciples. What does he say? Verse four. We're getting a lot out of verse 14, aren't we? We urge you, brothers, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint hearted.

Now look, help the weak. Help the weak. Help literally. To take up or to concern yourself with. Well, that's not hard to think about.

[49 : 10] And then weak. Those who are feeble. Those who are spiritually or morally immature and undiscerning. You know, we're at all, we're all at different levels of our spiritual walk with the Lord and different levels of growth and understanding.

So with someone like this, this is what you don't want to do. You don't want to have someone come into our fellowship and maybe say something doctrinally that's a little off.

And this is how we react. Shun the unbeliever. No, don't do that. Don't do that. If somebody says something a little, look, we, I had two seminary degrees and we showed up out at Grace and Grace showed me how theologically liberal and bankrupt my education had been.

I had so many things to unlearn whenever they'd start teaching in class. When I sat in classes, I would get beet red. I'd want to crawl up under the table because I thought somebody has written to them and told them all about what I studied and learned and what I've been doing.

No, they're just teaching the truth and the truth was convicting me and exposing to me many of the lies that I had come to believe because we tried to mix man's wisdom with God's wisdom.

[50 : 22] And I had to learn. I had to grow. If somebody says something that's a little off or believes something that's a little off from what we subscribe to here at Grace, those are opportunities for us to come alongside and walk with them and help them see in the scriptures what God says about that.

That's not just your opinion. It's what the Bible says. You see, that's what we're seeking to do with each other. And that's how we help people who are weak in the faith, perhaps less spiritually mature than we are in their walk with the Lord.

And that carries us into the second characteristic and I'll hasten on. Christian discipleship is sacrificial. Now, whichever of these three situations so far you might find yourself in, you're to exercise long suffering, forbearing with each other.

And that's the ability to patiently bear with the weaknesses of other Christians. Those weaknesses are going to show up at different times and in different ways.

Maybe something they say or do or the way they've lived their life or they're doing something that a while back you came under conviction about and so you don't do that anymore. Just be careful with things like that.

[51 : 39] Let God bring people where they need to be brought as you minister the truth to them and put your arm around them and walk with them. They say, Jeff, when does that change? Well, I've already mentioned it to you.

If we see another brother or sister in sin, that's not the time to come alongside and say, hey, can I talk to you about something? And, you know, just I'm just trying to just give you a couple things to think of.

No, you come alongside a brother and sister and what does Matthew 18 say? You confront your brother or sister in that sin and you bring that directly to them and you say to them, please repent of this.

Let me show you in the word where this is sin and I've seen this in your life and I want to walk with you, but we need we need to confront this. This needs to stop.

Right? That's what we do. Now, now, as I look into your eyes right now, I'm thinking, I know you're Americans, you're 21st century Americans and you're thinking, don't you get in my business like that?

[52 : 39] And I'm saying, oh, yes, I will. Well, and I have and I'll keep doing it and I want you to do it with each other because that's what discipleship is. So if you're in sin, you need to be confronted and you need to be you need to be told and shown in Scripture.

This is not how God would have you. This isn't Christlike. So as we consider all of these things being forbearing, yes, absolutely. And even in our confrontation in sin, it's the gentleness of wisdom.

So the next type of disciple needing help is this one. The wearisome disciple. Wearisome. We'll say, oh, heavens, I don't want to be wearisome to people. I know.

But what does he say? See to it. We urge you, brethren, the faint-hearted, the help of the weak, be patient with everyone. Be patient with everyone.

Patience. Be patient with all men. That's what he's saying. The context bears out that we are talking about each of our brothers and sisters in the church who grow more slowly in their faith than perhaps we do.

[53 : 49] That's fine. It's not a race like that. It's a marathon, right? Some are just brought along more slowly and sometimes it's even difficult to discern much growth at all over seasons of their life.

Paul says, be patient. Don't be Holy Spirit Nazis. Don't try to get into people's lives and make them be what you think they ought to be.

Meet them where they are and help bring them along in Christlikeness. That's a process. And you really got to get out of yourself to do that. You've got to let go of your agendas and think in terms of Christlikeness over time.

So as I've mentioned, admonishing, encouraging, and helping take you beyond yourself and beyond your own problems and issues and challenges. This kind of faithful relational involvement requires sacrifice on your part.

Then there's verse 15. Look at verse 15 with me. See that no one repays another with evil for evil. Always seek after that which is good for one another.

[54 : 57] There's another one another. And for all people. Now what is this? This is relating to wicked disciples. Say wicked disciples. I don't want to be one of those either. What's that? See to it that no one repays another with evil for evil.

Remember that's being said within the confines and context of the local church. Gathered believers coming together. See that none of you repay another person in the church with evil for the evil done to you.

You say, wow, Christians do evil to each other? They can. Christians can be wicked toward each other? They can. Christians can be that way. Evil can also translate meanness or wickedness.

You ever had a Christian be mean to you? People in the church are capable of meanness and wickedness towards one another. It's sad. It's challenging. But it's true.

So Paul says, don't be guilty of being mean and wicked to those in the church who might be that way to you. First of all, don't be that way. But if that happens to you and someone is mean, don't be mean back.

[56 : 03] Don't return it to them. You're a believer. Live the example that Jesus has left for you. So what this does, friends, this takes self and personal agenda out of the mix of your relationships with people who will abuse you and abuse your kindness to them and take advantage of you.

Unruly, faint-hearted, weak people in the body of Christ can be difficult to relate to. I understand that because they're not thinking in terms of what is best for you. They're thinking in terms of what's best for them in that moment.

Now we all go through moments and seasons like this, so we need the specific spiritual direction Paul gives next. What does he say? But always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.

Look right here. Look at that word right there. Do you know what that means? That's right. It means always. It means there's no place to eject. This is always the deal.

Always the deal. This is what we are to do as we abstain from acting in an evil and selfish way towards someone who's been evil toward us.

[57 : 22] So we're to maintain a forgiving spirit toward those who have wronged us. Say what if they don't ask for forgiveness? That's another sermon but I can tell you you can always hold forgiveness in your heart toward them even if they haven't sought forgiveness from you.

They may not even realize what they did. They're in such the habit of it. So we need to be forbearing. We're not to ask or expect them to do anything beyond what the Bible requires for forgiveness and repentance.

So we don't make people grovel and give them a list and tell them prove it. When you're wronged it's not about what you want in the way of restitution and reconciliation but what the Bible requires of the offender and the one offended.

And God will mend and mold us together and it corresponds to the third characteristic that I'll bring out for you very quickly here. Christian discipleship is intentional. If we look at verse 16 and just read down through the list I don't have time to go through all of this as thoroughly as I might if I were preaching I would have broken this up into probably three or four sermons.

I just want you to see the point. Look at verse 16 if you would. Rejoice. There's that word again always. Pray without ceasing. That means pray always.

[58 : 46] In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. I could just say in everything give thanks always. See? This is God's will. Do not quench the Holy Spirit.

Do not despise prophetic utterances. Examine everything careful. Hold fast to that which abstain from. You see the list there how that works? It's purposed and planned to have this impact on us about what it means for us to disciple each other and not allow things that would wreck the process of that.

So don't quench the spirit. Don't do these things. Do these things. Examine everything. Rejoice. Pray. These spiritual qualities are to characterize the normal everyday life of our relationships.

We are to deliberately admonish, encourage, and help each other in these things to God's glory. So now let me ask you a few questions here. How purposed and intentional are you and how you invest in others for the glory of God and their upbuilding and grace?

How much of your time and energy and resources are being used each day of your life in deliberate attempts to help others grow in the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ?

[60 : 09] I'm asking you that because I'm your pastor here along with Pastor Greg and we're saying are you deliberately and intentionally invested in this process with the people that you're sitting around right now?

And how are you doing that? How are you involving yourself in building each other up in this church family? Because you're the future. The baseline and culture that you're cultivating now in our church will be the baseline foundation and culture that we will build on as God continues to grow this assembly God willing, Lord willing.

that's what we want. So folks, this is the normal Christian life. The fact that we hear this and it seems too much to ask, the fact that it might sound like it would rob us of our own time and our own interests and our own pursuits, that's all just testimony of how far we've digressed from what is biblical about this process.

Remember that we're talking about you living out the great commission that Jesus mandates for your everyday life. This is a joy. It's not a burden. It is sacrificial.

It will challenge you. One of the most encouraging aspects of this intentional investment you would make in each other is that you're actually investing yourself in what matters most to God.

[61 : 33] How could you spend your life better than that? I'm actually investing my life in what matters most to God and what matters most to God sitting in this room right now.

His people. The souls that he will bring to heaven. So the ministry of pastors has much to do with equipping you for this work.

And then, as wisdom dictates, releasing you to do ministry in a biblical way. That's all I can say about that, but I wanted to mention it. Greg and I identify, train, equip, and follow up as we invest ourselves in people who will then in turn invest in others what we have put into them.

And I'm doing that right now. I can't do that with every individual person, but collectively I'm doing that right now. This is one critical reason why what you do in discipleship, now please hear this, this is one critical reason why what you do in discipleship, whether you're learning as a disciple, teaching others in discipleship, all of that needs to be done under a local church eldership who know you and are providing you with spiritual oversight.

Please don't let that escape you. This is all being couched within the local church environment and godly eldership is critical to this process.

[63 : 08] Alright, a few more things here. Our methods of discipleship have to grow out of an understanding of God's truth. Absolutely. There's been a lot of books written about how to disciple.

Just keep in mind it's a process. Keep it simple. We try to keep it simple here at Grace. We make it intentional but we also try to build it in as a natural part of the ebb and flow of our life here together.

Much of any effective or God-honoring discipleship is bound up in knowing who to read, who to listen to, and how to apply truth to your life. And that's where pastors come in.

We help you know who to read, we help you know who to listen to, and who not to listen to, and we help you learn how to apply truth to your life, and especially in sticky situations.

So please allow your elders to be a resource to you as you step out to invest in other people. At least we could pray for you. Now I want to make several statements to close out what I'm talking about.

[64 : 13] First of all, let me get through, first of all, a disciple maker is first a disciple, and then he is a patient, a patient listener.

Let me go back one so you can see the highlight. He's first a disciple. You and I need to be committed learners. That's what a disciple is. He's a follower or learner, who regularly learn from Jesus through prayer and scripture and the one another's that we practice.

So are you growing? I'm asking you, are you growing as a Christian? Do you have a spiritual plan for your growth in Christ's likeness, and are you following that plan?

Friends, you can't take others where you've never been. If you try to do that, it feels fake. It feels hypocritical, because it is.

You can't take other people where you can point them, and you can say, I'm trying to get there too. Can we do that together? Well, that's honest. And then this next one, a disciple maker is a patient listener.

[65 : 14] You ought to spend, folks here at Grace have heard me say this before. You ought to spend about 90% of your time listening, and the other 10% listening very carefully.

That's a backhanded way of your pastor saying, we all talk too much. Because we just have a hard time getting over ourselves. A listening, discerning heart, which is adept at filtering everything you hear through God's word, is a powerful, precious gift to give to people.

So it's not wrong for us to speak the truth in love. We have to speak. But before all of that happens, we need to do a lot of careful, loving listening. You realize, before we ever speak the truth in love, we listen in love.

And filter what we're hearing through the truth. And then finally, a disciple maker is a thoughtful speaker. A thoughtful speaker. A truthful speaker.

Let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God. That's 1 Peter 4.11. So we're sanctified, we're made more like Jesus and set apart to be holy by the truth of God's word.

[66 : 30] So it's only right that Peter would instruct us to speak God's truth into each other's lives. Opinions are fine, they can be, but what we're most concerned with is are we speaking God's truth to each other in love.

I pray this is going to take us further down the road of intentionally and biblically investing in the blessings and in the growth of each other as we do the one another's of scripture in this thing we call discipleship.

Discipleship. All right, let's pray together. Dear Father, we are challenged and convicted by your word as we've read through this passage even briefly this morning and we pray that you would help us by your Holy Spirit to take into heart what we have heard, what perhaps we're being challenged with or convicted, that we wouldn't allow our hearts to become discouraged by it as we measure ourselves against the truth and realize that we are coming up short, but that it would make us want to run to you, to run to Jesus and to seek your wisdom and how we can be more faithful, more focused and invested in our lives in what matters most to you.

I thank you for these precious, precious souls and friends here at Grace Lord. Greg and I are so very grateful to be shepherds in their lives and that they trust us and allow us to share life with them.

May you help them now to be steadied and readied in their hearts as they serve you. May you give them a wonderful, deep and abiding sense of your love for them as your children.

[68 : 22] May you help them to stand in discernment against the schemes of the devil and not be deceived and drawn away from a simple and pure devotion to Jesus. It's in his name that we pray and for your glory, Lord.

Amen.