

Together We Build

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 28. The title of our message this morning, continuing the sort of topical series we've been doing going along with the book "Discipling: How to help others follow Jesus," which is a book that we've invited each family in the church, those of you who are visiting with us are welcome to one as well. It's an excellent little book by Mark Dever, "Discipling: How to help others follow Jesus." And we feel like this is something that the Lord wants our congregation really to be thinking a lot about and applying and trying to see how this changes the way that we approach our lives and our church. So I want to encourage you to get one of those there in the foyer if you haven't yet gotten one.

The title of the message, I'm doing a topical series that we've been looking at sort of building a theology of the church, sort of an ecclesiology in a way, a theology of relationships. We've been looking at a number of passages, a number of concepts, and last week we spent some time talking about the church and the glory of the church and how the church as God sees it, and as even the angels see the church, is much different than what we see. The church is not the building, it's the people. It's those people that belong to Jesus Christ. It is the assembly of called out saints. And we saw last week that what the church is, it's a temple. We're being built into a spiritual temple and we're building-blocks, as the passage that was read earlier by Jess. We're living stones. That's another example, another place the Scripture shows us this reality. We're being built into a house for God to dwell in, that corporately in our gathering, in our relationships, God dwells among us. So when we gather on Sunday mornings to worship or we gather for Bible studies, there is a sense in which we're forming a building spiritually that God dwells in, and how that changes the way we see what we're doing. How wonderful that is, and we saw where the body of Christ, we were looking at Ephesians 2, 3 and 4, how we are the physical body of Christ now; that he has ascended into glory, he manifests his character through us in our relationships to one another; and how we are also the greatest and most glorious of all of his works is the church in her consummation.

So we talked about what the church is and today we're going to talk about how the church is to be built. In fact, the title for the message is "Together We Build." I borrowed that from a... when I was young in a Baptist church that I grew up in, we had a building program called "Together We Build." Very catchy. It stayed with me all these years. Here that's what I think of. Nothing wrong with a building fund or a building program, I mean,

that's important to provide space for the saints to gather and so that's an important thing but it's not quite as important as the building that we're doing all the time when we gather together which is building one another. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says that we are to encourage one another and build up one another, and the word for "build," it's a good translation of that word. It's picturing building a house and you're building each other into that house and we are called to do that. Actually, that word is used throughout the New Testament and it's usually translated "edify." You're edifying, you're building up other believers and that's what we're called to do. We're called to build the church, but this isn't the launching of a building program, though we are actually going to be talking about that before too long because we are realizing we have some space needs and we want to think wisely about that. So you'll be hearing more about that, but the real building program that is always to be primary and focal, we pray in this gathering of saints, is the building of the spiritual temple.

So that's what we're talking about today, "Together We Build," and we're going to look at Matthew 28:16-20, a very familiar passage that has been titled "The Great Commission," and we're going to glean some things from there and then look at how those things are worked out in the life and ministry of our Savior. Matthew 28:16,

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come now asking that you would bless us. Help us to understand the glory of our Savior, the wonder of his authority, and the rightness and beauty of his plan and his instruction. Give us the help of the Holy Spirit in understanding and applying these things to our hearts and our lives, that we might be built up more into what you want us to be. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So we talked last time about what the church is and now we're really talking about how the church is to be built and so "Together We Build" is the title of the message and there are two main points that we're going to gather our thoughts around and then we'll see three sub points for each main point and the sub points are the same. So anyway, you won't feel like when I say that I missed...you know, it sounds confusing. "Hey, those are the same sub points before. Did I fall asleep and wake up or something?" But anyway, no.

The first point is how do we build the church? The question we're asking is how do we build the spiritual body? How do we build the church to be all that God wants it to be?

How do we build one another? And we want to say, first of all, that we build according to Jesus' pattern. We build according to Jesus' pattern. It's interesting here at the end, he's basically giving them the instruction for how to build the church and he says the imperative, the one command that is there in his great commission is the one imperative command is the verb "make disciples." That's the main command in this passage. "Go therefore and make disciples." Actually, "go" is a participle, "having gone" is the idea. "Therefore having gone or wherever you've gone, make disciples of all nations." So the participle is "go," and then "baptizing and teaching" show us how we are to do the main thing of making disciples.

So my point is that Jesus' pattern, how did he build the church? He said he was going to build the church. We spoke briefly last week about Matthew 16 where Jesus says to Peter, "Blessed are you Simon bar-Jonah," after Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He gets it. By God's grace he sees that the glorious truth that all creation has been pointing to and all Scripture has been pointing to is that God would send his Anointed One, the Savior of the world, and he says, "You are He. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus says, "That's right. God has revealed that to you and upon this profession and upon you, I will build My church." So Jesus is the one that builds his church. He is the one who began the church. He's the Author and Finisher of our faith. He's the one who continues to build his church.

So how did Jesus begin to build his church and how is he continuing to build his church? Well, we look at the pattern. We build according to Jesus' pattern. How did he go about building the spiritual house of God in his earthly ministry? He made disciples. That's what he did. He made disciples. He could have done it any way, I mean, we might not have anticipated that he would have done it the way...these things get to be old hat and we forget how surprising it is, but it's really astonishing that the way Jesus chose to build his church was to call, particularly 12 men to himself, enter into a rabbi and disciple relationship and spend basically every day for more than three years with these men, pouring himself into them, and by doing that, to begin laying the foundation for that spiritual temple. Then, of course, he's going to tell them, "Keep building according to My pattern. Make disciples."

Now, he called people to be his disciples, he invited people to follow him. Not just the 12, that was actually the language that he uses throughout his ministry. What is the invitation? "Follow Me." Hey, you look at this in Matthew, turn back to chapter 4, verse 19, where we see Jesus begin to call his disciples. Matthew 4:18, "Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.'" Chapter 8, verse 22 of Matthew. He sees a crowd, I mean, he sees a crowd around him, he gives orders to depart to the other side of the sea, but before he goes, he teaches. "Then a scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.' Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' Another of the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.'" The invitation to be a

Christian is essentially summed up in that idea, "Follow Me and become a disciple." Every Christian is truly a disciple; that the calling to become one of God's children is a call to follow Jesus. We see this in chapter 9, verse 9, where he calls Matthew, the author of this Gospel. "As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he got up and followed Him." Throughout his ministry, that's his word. You see it also in chapter 16, verse 24, chapter 19, verse 21, "Follow Me," to the rich young ruler. "Go and sell all that you have and follow Me."

So he invited people to become his followers, to become his disciples, and it's helpful for us as we contemplate what that means to understand something of the nature of the original context of those words. When Jesus was issuing this command to, "Follow Me," in first century Judaism they understood that. It wasn't just like we would say, "Follow me." We don't do this anymore, now we have GPS, right? It used to be, "Hey, we're going to a restaurant and it's over this way. You follow me." Right? And so you try not to beat a red light when they have to stay behind or if you do, you pull off to the side. And that is so antiquated that we had to do that, wasn't it? Now it's just like, give them the restaurant name, plug it in and go. We lose something that way, though. I feel like I'm losing my sense of direction, actually. I'm sorry I got off on that.

The point is, "Follow Me," to us means something very different than it meant to them and the whole idea of discipleship is very different than what it meant to them. To be invited to be someone's disciple was an incredible thing, and to be allowed to be someone's disciple was an incredible blessing, and what it meant was that you were making a commitment of your life. You were radically re-altering the whole structure of your life to put all of your focus on learning from this great teacher. A rabbi is actually the English word, it's transliterated from the Greek "rhabbi," which is transliterated actually, not translated from the Hebrew word. The Hebrew word as well means "great." So it really means "my great one," literally. "Rabbi" means "my great one," and it means "the great teacher; the one that I've made great in my life; the one that I'm putting all of my focus on to learn from."

So Jesus' approach and the way that he builds his church is he calls people to have a totally different focus of life; to go from living for yourself to now living for the one rabbi. Now he said though we make disciples also, we don't make disciples to ourselves. There is only one true rabbi. That's why he says, "You don't call yourselves," in Matthew when he's talking to the Pharisees, rebuking them in Matthew 23, he says to his disciples, he turns aside and says, "Don't call yourselves rabbi for there is only one rabbi. Don't call yourselves teacher, there is only one teacher." So when he tells them later to make disciples, he's not saying, "Don't make yourself the great one in their lives, there is only one rabbi. There is only one teacher." But you are to do what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, you're to say to other Christians, "Be imitators of me as I imitate Christ. Follow me as I follow Christ. He's the one." But this is how Jesus is building his spiritual house for his Father's glory. He's taking people who used to be living for themselves and now have a radically re-altered approach to life where it's all about following him, and we see this unfolding in his ministry. I mean, he had his public ministry of preaching and teaching

but his private ministry of pouring into these disciples. He had a priority throughout his earthly ministry.

Now, I said there are three sub points. I want to begin to unpack those three sub points. The first main point: we're building according to Jesus' pattern. This is how we build the church. We build according to Jesus' pattern and the three sub points help us understand. And how do you build according to his pattern? In a sentence: make disciples. That's what he did. What does it mean to make disciples? That's where the three sub points come in. What does that look like? It begins with a call of submission. It begins with an invitation to absolute submission. We might say it begins by inviting someone to be submitted to the authority of Jesus. This is what he's doing. When he says, "Come and follow Me," he's inviting them to submit themselves to his authority.

Submission to his authority. In the first century and it comes this way even after that but particularly for our understanding, to be a disciple of a rabbi was to bring your thinking below the teaching of the rabbi; to submit to his authority. "Follow Me," means he's going to determine where we go. It's not like they're suggesting all the time, taking a vote, "Hey, do we go to this town or this town? All in favor say aye." That's not the way it works with a rabbi/disciple relationship. The question is, "Where are we going?" You ask him.

So it means submission to his authority. Teacher, master. This is how we translate that word. If you translate "rabbi," it's "teacher, master." You're the one who is going to teach me. I need to learn. You're the one that will guide me. I need a master. It's closely akin to the idea of lord and slave because the disciple would do the menial task for the rabbi, would do whatever the rabbi told him to do just for the privilege of now following this man, being permitted into his life and to hear his teaching and to have the opportunity to learn from him whatever is required.

So it begins with submission to the authority and so that's when he goes up to Simon Peter and John as we read Matthew 4 and says, "Follow Me." They understood what he was saying. It was an invitation to discipleship, to submission. So the first sub point, if you're building disciples, what does that mean? What Jesus did was he called people to be submitted to his authority. Secondly, he called his disciples to be committed to conformity. Committed to conformity to him. That part of what it meant to be a disciple of a rabbi was that you were committing your life to becoming just like your rabbi. "I want to learn from you so that I can be like you. I want to think like you. I want to act like you. I want to follow you."

Now, of course, Jesus is much more, he's also the Son of the living God but this is part of how his paradigm for ministry was to invite people into this kind of relationship so that as they were with him submitting to his authority, committed to following him, they would begin to see the glory and they could say as John says, "What we have seen, what we have heard, what we have beheld, what our hands have handled concerning the word of life, we now make known, we declare to you. We were with him, we saw him, we

watched him, we touched him, we heard him and we now know that he is the Son of the living God."

So Jesus invites that. First of all, submitted to his authority. Secondly, committed to conformity. They are committed to be just like Jesus. There is a beauty of that, even model, isn't it? You see that in the New Testament. What is our goal? Conformity to Jesus.

So submitted to the authority, that's the first sub point. The second sub point: committed to conformity. Thirdly, permitted into intimacy with Christ. Permitted into intimacy with Christ. When you look at the New Testament, back when we were working through John's Gospel, the first chapter you see Jesus calling disciples there too, or the Lord bringing disciples to him, in a sense. We see it was a multifaceted process. Like what we see in John 1 is complemented by what we see in Matthew 4, that in John 1 what happens is basically we have John along with Andrew, the Gospel writer along with Andrew, who are disciples of John the Baptist. John the Baptist is their rabbi. They're spending time following John the Baptist. They are submitted to him, committed to him, to becoming like him. They are permitted into his intimacy and they're with John the Baptist when Jesus comes on the scene and is baptized and they're there, as he says in John 1:35, "Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples," and John the Baptist, this is John the Baptist now. One of the guys there is another John, the Gospel writer. So it's John the Baptist, John and Andrew are the two disciples. Jesus comes into sight and John the Baptist says, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" He points to the Messiah and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God! This is the one that we've been waiting for."

"The two disciples," verse 37, "heard him speak, and," what? "They followed Jesus." That's actually a beautiful picture what discipleship really is, what we're called to do. We're in a sense saying, "Hey, follow me as I follow Christ," and somebody looks at your life and they say, "I want to be like you." This is one of the ways God brings people to faith. "I want the joy that you have. I want the ability to live the way that you live." And we say, "Follow me as I follow Christ," and the next thing you know they're not looking at us anymore, they're looking at the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They're following him. Then our mission is to keep helping each other keep our eyes on him.

But verse 37, "The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." Verse 38, "And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?'" This is back to our third point: permitted into intimacy. This is how they understood what it was to be a disciple. Look what they say, "We have been a disciple of John the Baptist." They don't bother telling him that right now. There's not time for that. They're basically asking him if they can become his disciples. But how do they understand that? Look what they say. When he says, "What do you seek?" They said to him, "Rabbi," we want You to be our great teacher, "(which translated means Teacher)," what's the question they ask? "Where are You staying?" We want to live with You. We want to be in Your presence. "Where are You staying?" And when Jesus answers them, "Come, and you will see," he's receiving them into his intimacy. "You now are My disciples." And so permitted into

intimacy with Jesus. That's what these disciples had. They followed him on a daily basis every day for more than three years. They saw him morning, evening, night. They saw him pray early in the morning. They find him praying, they find him talking to God his Father. They saw him touch the leper. They saw him rebuke the Pharisees. And all along they were seeking to learn from him, to be submitted to him, to be committed to conformity with him.

Now, we could spend more time there but I want to move to the main point of the second point which is really from our passage. How are we to build? Together we build. How do we build the church? Our first point was we build according to Jesus' pattern, the second point is we build according to Jesus' instruction which is Matthew 28. When Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," what an amazing declaration that is. "I have not only all authority on the earth," that's astounding. Basically all of the world has been brought back under the authority of God because of what he did on the cross and the resurrection. But not only that, but all authority has been given to him in heaven. "Because of this authority that I have now, I'm sending you forth and this is to give you the encouragement that you need to go forth into the world that still is very dark because I haven't made an end of all the evil. I have done all that's necessary but I'm allowing time for more people to repent, more disciples to be found. Go into the darkness. Don't be afraid of the darkness. I'm in authority over all and go and make disciples."

We build according to Jesus' instruction; his instruction is exactly the same as his pattern. How did he build the church? His pattern was he made disciples. What's his instruction to us, how are we to build the church? We are to make disciples. This is the calling for every Christian and it's because every Christian is called to follow Jesus, and if you're called to follow Jesus, we follow – Mark Dever says this in his book, "Discipling" – we follow the one who called people to follow him by calling people to follow him. You can't follow the one that's calling you without doing what he's called you to do without doing what he did. You want to be like him, you have to call other people to follow him. So it's not just for pastors or elders or Bible teachers, it's for all Christians. We are all called to make disciples. If you're called to be a disciple, you must make disciples. And we're all called to build and isn't that wonderful? We're all called to build this glorious spiritual edifice that our eyes can't fully see the glory of but that the angels can, like we saw last week from Ephesians 3. When we pursue unity, when we work through issues and grant forgiveness and love flows, it makes the angels, it takes their breath away.

This is what we're called to build and we do it by focusing on this simple plan, this instruction, this blueprint. We build according to Jesus' instruction. We make disciples. As the book says, we help others follow Jesus, and we know that we need help from others to follow Jesus. So it's a mutual disciple making. And disciple making, it really is, there's this mutuality. Even when there's a more formal relationship and one person is maybe the spiritually more mature person, the other says, "Would you please spend time with me and help me?" and this relationship forms, there is still a mutuality about it, isn't it? Because we're all followers of Jesus. We're all sheep. We all need to be shepherded and we can learn from the person who just comes to faith. The person who is born again

by the Spirit and who repents and places their faith in Jesus, that moment they're the newest baby in the kingdom yet we can learn from that person because they have the Spirit of God; they have the grace of God, the power of God at work in them.

So now, what does it mean then? How do we build according to that pattern? How do you make disciples? It's kind of those same three sub points. This is what I was saying earlier: submitted, committed, permitted. How do you make disciples? You invite people to be submitted to the authority of Jesus. This is the first thing to becoming a disciple. You must submit yourself to the authority of Jesus. This is why the whole Lordship salvation debate, if you just read your Bible carefully there should be no debate. There are those who say that you can receive Jesus somehow as Savior but not as Lord. The New Testament knows nothing of that. To be a Christian is to be a disciple and so to be a disciple is to be submitted. This is why Paul says that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved." It's not just the belief, the assent, it's the surrender of the heart to Christ.

That's where true knowledge of Jesus comes and so that's what he's calling for when he says, "Follow Me." This is what makes sense, too, of passages like this, Luke 9:23. Here Jesus is preaching publicly to the crowds but what is he doing? He's seeking to make disciples of the crowd. Where does he start? With this invitation to submit. Luke 9:23, "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'" The invitation to be a Christian is that invitation right there. To deny self, to no longer make your own ideas, your own vision, your own desires the central thing in your life but to have a great one, a master, a lord, to whom you will submit everything else. "Deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Me." Following him by taking up the cross, dying to self again and again and again.

He says in Luke 14 a few pages over, large crowds were going along with him, verse 25, Luke 14:25, "Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them." Here are all these people interested in Jesus, in the miracles that he's doing, but what does it mean to be a Christian? What is it that you have to do to be a Christian? He turns around and says to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." This is a hard saying of Jesus, isn't it? "I mean, wait a minute, Lord, you said that we're to love our father and honor our parents, our father and mother. Other places you rebuke the Pharisees for not caring for their parents. Why are you saying we must hate our father and our mother? And Paul tells us we're to love our wives as Christ loved the church." We're certainly to love and care for our children and our brothers and sisters, what's he saying? He's using this figure of speech to say that, "Comparatively the love that you have for your father and your mother, your wife, your children, your sister and your brothers, the love that you have for them must be as though it were hate in comparison to the supreme love that you have for Me." There can only be one great one in your life, Jesus Christ.

So this is what he's saying: it's a call to submission to the absolute authority of Jesus. You submit to his authority gladly because you know he has all authority. He deserves the submission. He has conquered death. He died on the cross for our sins. He paid the full sacrifice. He's not only an authoritative rabbi, he is an amazingly gracious and loving and kind rabbi. He is someone who said, "I did not come to be served, but to serve," and he gave his life a ransom for many. What manner of God is this? But it begins with submission so we invite people to be submitted to the authority of Jesus. This is what the terms are. Where there is no submission, there is no salvation. Now the rest of your life is living out that submission, isn't it, on a daily basis? That's why he said, "Take up your cross daily." It's a daily dying to self. God is glorified in us daily confronting our sinfulness, confronting our pride, confronting the lusts of our hearts, and dying to them by his grace and for his glory.

But, secondly, how do you make disciples? You not only invite them to be submitted to the authority of Jesus, you, secondly, invite them to become committed to conformity to Jesus. This is the pathway. This is what a Christian is called to be, to be like Jesus; to become like your teacher. He says that in Matthew 10:25, he says that a disciple, it is good enough for a disciple to be like his teacher. This is what's understood, that in that day to be a disciple of a master is to be like him; to be of the rabbi is to be like him. That's what you want and that's what the New Testament teaches we are about. The whole purpose of God in saving us is to make us like Christ. Romans 8:28 says, "For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." And a lot of people know that verse and don't know the next verse and it's confusing when you don't know the next verse because the next verse explains what his purpose is. It's not just that God causes all things to work together for good to everyone, he "causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called to His purpose." And what is his purpose? He says in verse 29, "that we might be conformed to the image of His Son that He might become the firstborn among many brethren." That we might be just like Jesus. This is what the calling to the Christian life is. He's going to make us more and more like Jesus.

I love that picture in 2 Corinthians 3. In fact, turn over there for a moment. 2 Corinthians 3, a beautiful word picture. It pictures what sanctification is, the putting off of sin and the walking by the power of the Spirit to be more like Jesus. Look, he says in verse 17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Verse 18, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." He's saying the Holy Spirit, the work that he's doing in us is he is teaching us to look, as it were, in a mirror at the glory of Jesus, and as you look at the glory of Jesus, it is a mirror because slowly you are being conformed into the image of your Master. That's the beauty of it, what the Spirit is doing. That's what we're called to be. We're called to be more and more like him. John says that the one who says he loves Jesus must also walk just as Jesus walked. If there is not a desire to be like him, then you must question whether or not you really know him.

So the Christian is called to be committed to the conformity to Jesus. Now, how does that happen? How does this conformity happen? Back to our passage, Matthew 28. It comes up in the participles baptizing and teaching. We're making disciples, that is, we're making people who are submitted to his authority, we're making people who are committed to his conformity, to conformity to be like him, and how does that happen? It happens as you are baptizing and teaching, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." I mean, baptism is that sacrament or ordinance that we partake in when we become a follower of Jesus and it's actually a public declaration of our identification with Christ. We're now identifying with Jesus. "I am a follower of Jesus." That's what that meant, as well as the fact that my life is united to him in baptism, the picture of I'm saying in being baptized when I'm put in the water, "I need to be bathed. I need to be cleansed. I'm a sinner." This is what the Jews that were baptized in Jesus' name were saying. "Yes, I too, even as a Jew, need to be cleansed, and in the death and burial and resurrection of Christ, I am cleansed." And baptism, outward water baptism, is a picture of inward, real, spiritual baptism which is union with Christ. To be a Christian is to be united to Jesus, in the truest sense of the word, to become one with him so that his death is your death, his resurrection is your resurrection. So he says baptizing them is part of making disciples because baptizing them is the outward proclamation by the disciple, "I am identifying with Christ. I am submitted to him. I am committed to following him."

And then how does that continue to be worked out after that initial testimony of baptism? It's in the "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Teaching. You know, actually the word translated "disciple, make disciples of all the nations," the Greek word "disciple" comes from a verb which means "to learn." So disciples are learners. They are people who are life-long learners. So the call to be committed to Jesus, submitted to Jesus, committed to Jesus means you're going to be a life-long learner. You're going to devote yourself to the teaching about Christ. The true believer should never think that they've, "Yeah, I don't need to hear that. I don't need to hear anymore preaching or teaching." Well, you know, when you hear someone preach a passage that you've just recently heard preached, "Yeah, I've already done that." That's really foolish, isn't it? I find it amazing how I can hear someone else, I can have preached a passage and then somebody else brings it.... let me change that, after I will preach a message, talking with you sometimes after the service out in the foyer, later that week, you will say things that almost seems to imply... this is what I said, and you'll say something that I know I didn't say that. I wish I had. I wish you had helped me with that before I preached it. But the Spirit of God did something in you, made an association in your heart, and you saw something and now you're sharing it back with me. This is where the word of God is dwelling richly within us. We're speaking the word back and forth and the Spirit is working and we're each imparting blessing and the sum of all of it is greater than the parts, this richness that comes from the truth.

But we are as believers to be committed to always learning. Always ready to learn. And, you know, mature believers no matter how old they are, they know they have more to learn. In fact, that's something that you get to know the older you get, isn't it? As you're really growing in grace, you say, "I have so much to learn." And so every time you can

hear another brother share something from the word of God, "Bring it on!" That should be our heart. "Share with me."

And this is what brings about that conformity, the more the word impacts us, the more the word is shared by other believers, and there is something about the way God's design in the way he reveals his word throughout history. He could have just spoken from heaven. I mean, think about that. Again, we know what's happened and we forget about the possibilities. He did speak directly to different people at times in the Old Testament, he spoke through visions, many and diverse ways as the author of Hebrews says. But his basic pattern that he established very soon was he would speak to one person and that one person was to speak to others. He would speak to a human being and that human being was to share it with other people. It would be more impressive if you got it directly from him all the time, wouldn't it? And a lot of times people want that. They want something impressive but God chooses to make us listen to his word through other people.

Calvin has a great quote in his "Institutes" speaking about the wonder of preaching when he says it pleases God, he said it would be something if God spoke directly from heaven and we submitted to it. But how much more wonderful is it when God speaks, when some puny man risen from the dust, when some puny man risen from the dust speaks the word of God and we submit to it, we show our true piety. "I just want to hear what God says and I'm willing to hear it even from you. You're willing to hear it even from me." Puny men and God, it's all from God. His ways are not our ways. His ways are far more wonderful than our ways.

So we must be committed to conformity with Jesus and it comes through this ongoing teaching, the ministry of the word, hearing from one another, being open and correctable, inviting that. A wise man loves correction. A fool spurns reproof. So we invite people to be disciples of Jesus. This is how we build the church and we invite them to continue being disciples by being submitted to his authority, committed to his conformity and, thirdly, permitted into intimacy with Jesus and ourselves. The pattern that Jesus employed was to call for submission, to call for the commitment to conformity, and then he permitted those into his heart, and this is the call for every person that follows Jesus now. He still is permitting us into the secret place of his fellowship. That's the amazing thing, you're invited into a community with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God invites you to come into his throne room. This is the invitation of the Gospel. You and I before we knew Christ, we were separate from the commonwealth of Israel, we were excluded from the covenants of promise, we were alienated from God, hating God, and yet God said, "Because of what I've done in Christ, I invite you to be reconciled and brought into my very heart, not just no longer enemies, now at peace with me. No, beyond that. Not just no longer enemies, now servants. No, beyond that. Not just formerly enemies, now my own precious children, my own family."

This is the God of the Bible and so then how does he make disciples? He tells us who have been invited into his intimacy to go out and to ask people to be submitted, to be committed and, yes, to do that by permitting them into our lives. This is the pattern that we see. This is what he did and this is what you see Paul did. He always had companions

with him. Go out alone, you know, the Lone Ranger Christians? You see Paul asking for Timothy to stay with him and then Timothy becomes his true child in the faith, his disciple. And then what does Paul say to Timothy? "Hey, the things that you learned from me, the things that you learned from me where I was sort of not a rabbi but I was a small teacher of the true Teacher, the things that you learned from me, you commit to faithful men. You disciple others. You invite them into your heart and in doing that don't let them stop there, invite them into the heart of Christ."

You know, this idea of observing all that I command you, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you," you're teaching but your teaching has a practical focus. It's to observe all that I commanded you. The verb is an infinitive there, "to observe" means "to watch; to attend carefully to something; to give thoughtful and careful attention to the idea." What Jesus has commanded, we're really looking at it in a thoughtful, careful way as we understand it and apply it, and that the place where this happens, I think particularly was in the context of relationships as you go through life and this is how he taught them. They're walking along, things happen and Jesus teaches. They watch what he did in certain circumstances. And this is how we're supposed to impact one another. This is how we're supposed to do it in our families. "As you walk by the way, as you sit down, as life comes at you, bring My word to bear. Observe it. Think about how it applies."

This is the challenge for us, particularly as Americans, because and I think even maybe it's even tougher in the South. I don't know. I've pondered the different things, the differences that culture make. As Americans, we tend to be very individualistic, right? Western society in general is more individualistic. Eastern society more corporate. One of the ways I remember one of my Korean brothers in seminary was sharing about this and he said even the way that we say our name shows this. Somebody may ask you your name and what do you say? If you're an American, you say your first name. "My name is Ty." Or you might say, "Ty Blackburn." Just giving you the extra information, it's not really that important but my last name. I mean, that's how we think. When you ask a Korean or an Asian what their name is, they give you their last name first, then their first name. "Kim." Now they then in America they learn to give it to us the right way that we do, you know. But what it says is they think in terms of, "I'm a part of a family and then I'm an individual." We think, "I'm an individual and I'm also, yeah, I'm part of a family." Well, I think ultimately the biblical pattern is somewhere in the middle because you have to individually follow Jesus but once you individually follow Jesus, you find that you're not individually following Jesus, you're following with a whole bunch of other people and you've got to see that. So there is this East and West meets in Jerusalem at the cross. Pretty interesting, pretty much does, too.

So this means that we have to challenge ourselves to think in terms of inviting people in more. Our culture, I mentioned Southern culture, we're in the South, growing up in the South, you know, we're friendly and warm. I mean, you're more apt to get... Atlanta is kind of a mixed, now we've got so many people from other places, 5 ½ million people. I mean, if I was... How many of you were born and raised in Atlanta? Just curious. Look at that. Not many. It's probably 20% maybe, 30% of the congregation. I was. But so it's not

really Atlanta, it's not really the South anymore necessarily. Some of you are from the South, others of you from other places. There's nothing wrong with being from anywhere. There are strengths in every place, right? But in the South, we tend to, like if you go out in the rural area and you're driving down the road and you've never seen this guy before, he'll wave at you. It's just polite. Why wouldn't you wave? We're driving down the same road. Look how much we have in common. But in the North, it wouldn't be like that. Or maybe some places in the North would, yes, away from the cities, right? So I know I'm getting into dangerous territory.

But the point is that whatever your culture is, that needs to also bow to the Scripture, and we can be into pleasantries and kind but not really let people in, and we've got to challenge ourselves and help one another to get past that because the New Testament is saying if you're going to make disciples, you have to not only call them to be submitted to the authority of Christ and committed to conformity in Christ, but you have to call them to being permitted into the intimacy with Christ and that's best illustrated and even experienced in the intimacy with other believers. And when we open up our hearts and says, "Hey, you can walk with me through life. Let's walk together through life."

Dever has some helpful illustrations of this in his book and I want to just read to you a little bit of this. He says discipling is kind of fashion modeling. That's kind of a scary thing there. Then he says, "No, you're not showing off clothes for a photographer, you're demonstrating a fashion or way of living for others to follow. Discipling is inviting them to imitate you, making your trust in Christ an example to be followed. It requires you to be willing to be watched and then folding people into your life so that they actually do watch." He says, "We disciple not just through our strength but through our weakness." This is why we don't have to be afraid of letting him watch. They can see our weakness. "Christian discipling is not so much the work of experts and technocrats, to borrow the old phrase, it's the work of one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

He goes on, "Erin Wheeler, wife to Brad Wheeler who pastored with me in Washington, DC, reflected in an article how she had to learn these lessons about discipleship. Another woman in the church showed up at Erin's house expecting to be discipled. Erin welcomed her inside, closed the door behind her, and Erin thought to herself, 'there is this girl come over for discipling, Erin thought to herself, 'I am a mess. I have no idea what I'm doing here. There certainly isn't any teaching going on today with my crazy hooligan children and my heart in a bad place toward my husband. I shouldn't be teaching anyone. I'm the one who needs discipling. God, what would you have me do?' Yet God would soon teach Erin through situations like these that he would use her weakness as much as her strength. These younger women in the faith needed someone to teach them what it looks like to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength, not just in the good times but in the challenging times. Erin explains, 'In discipling these women, I tried to instruct and question them, discuss books together and pray, but they would tell me later that often the best teaching came from simply watching me. They watched God use my weakness in fighting for patience when the day had long since worn thin. They watched me struggle to love my husband after sharing my struggles with the competing demands of ministry.'" Dever writes, "These women got a front row seat, she observed, to seeing the true jar of

clay that she is. But learning this Gospel perspective encouraged her to keep pouring herself out like a drink offering knowing that God would use her frailty as a platform to display his strength and sure enough again and again, God proved faithful to supply everything she needed to love and serve these sisters." And she concludes, "That is our confidence, not that we have the perfect home and well-behaved children, but that in the muck and mire, God's Spirit is at work. Even in our weakness, God uses our words to warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, comfort the weak, and show patience to everyone all for his great glory."

That is what we're called to do. We've got to work at making that happen. As leaders of the church, we're really burdened about this and we're trying to, you know, this is one of the reasons we started the home groups, this is one of the reasons we're going to be in a lot of things after the service trying to promote more fellowship after church. But pray for us, all of us, that we would be submitted to God and be more like Jesus and help others follow Jesus.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you that you are a God of grace and mercy. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are a disciple making Savior, that you are one who comes to those who are a mess and you make us more like you every day. Thank you that your blood is sufficient to wash away every stain and your resurrection gives us the victory that cannot be taken away. We pray that you would be glorified in your church as you build it and as we join with you in building it according to your example and your command. We pray this in your name. Amen.