



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Developing Disciples

The Target of Village Discipleship | Part 2

Tim Badal | September 13, 2015 | Luke 14:25–35



Turn to Luke 14:25-35. We continue in our short three-week series looking at a new direction and focus that the elders and staff have been working through and contemplating. This started about nine months ago at our staff retreat where we began to look at what the next ten years of ministry is going to look like and what our focus needs to be. We came up with this idea that disciple-making is going to be our priority and focus. Last week we learned that we need to be discovering disciples through assimilation and evangelism. We need to be finding those disciples whom God has called to be His followers. Then we need to develop them. We're going to talk about what it means to develop disciples in greater detail today. We're going to do that through a ministry of interaction, instruction and imitation.

Next week we're going to talk about what it means to deploy disciples. We'll look at what it means as we make disciples, then to send them out to do ministry close to home. Many of you who were not here in the first service were serving in various ministries of the church because you've been deployed to do ministry. All of these ministries are areas of deployment, like soldiers we've sent out to do the ministry that God has for them. But we also recognize that our job is not just to deploy people to serve us but that we're also called to be deployed to serve our neighbors and communities. Sometimes we even have the great opportunity to deploy those from within to go to the uttermost parts of the world. So in these next weeks—and even in the months and years to come—we're going to talk about how we can do a better job and in greater ways discover, develop and deploy disciples for the glory of God.

Today we come to the issue of development. But before we get there I want to remind you why this is so important. Why would we take these three weeks at the beginning of a new year of ministry to stop and talk about these things? There are three reasons I want to give that will help you understand why this vision is so important.

1. The reason we need a vision like this is it helps all of our workers find their place in what is the heartbeat of God. So if you're serving with the young people, or in small group, or behind the scenes, you will recognize your ministry is something that God is passionate about. The Bible makes it clear that God is passionate about making disciples. What you're doing is something that God Himself is passionate about.
2. A vision helps bring to every person a sense of reason for their involvement in Village Bible Church. It is really easy to go through the motions on Sunday and then leave saying, "What was accomplished?" We want to make sure that everything you're part of—fellowship activities, small groups, ministry opportunities—is intentional and is making disciples through discovering, developing and deploying them. So we want people to understand we're not just a place that offers programs or events that have no focus. All of our events, programs, and studies will be focused in and funneled through this vision of making disciples.
3. It brings great clarity to the reason we serve. You may hand out bulletins, work in the kitchen, teach kids, work with the students, sing on the worship team or lead a group. These ministries aren't here just to keep you busy. You are joining in the process of making disciples so that at the end of the day we know we are doing our duty in presenting every church member to God in a growing and vibrant relationship with Him. That's what we want to accomplish. So this series is a

glimpse of what God is calling the church to do. He wants us to live on mission so that we may impact the world we live in, not just in the Fox Valley area.

Last week we learned that we are to discover disciples through evangelism and assimilation. That discovery is one not of judgment but of love. It's an invitation for people to find rest, not religion. As we continue to flesh out this vision, I pray that we would see a great number of people come to know Jesus Christ and His church as a result of our evangelistic work in the world.

Once we discover disciples, what are we to do with them? Our vision statement says this: Village Bible Church not only seeks to discover disciples but now we seek to develop disciples who are those who diligently learn, passionately love and purposefully live for the glory of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We've got to grow that. That's not going to happen on its own. We need to develop habits, disciplines, and ways of understanding and knowing our God more intimately that will allow us to do these three things for His glory and renown.

As people we love to see things develop. We love our relationships to develop. If you're married or if you have children, you desire to get to know them, not superficially, but in a deep and meaningful way. As a parent I love to watch my children develop. Even though we're in the awkward time where barriers and boundaries are being pushed, we love to see our children develop from young men and young women to being full-fledged adults.

When we think of development we think of terms like growth and advancement. That all sounds great. While that's definitely true, I think there's an aspect of development that we miss. When I was younger there wasn't as much opportunity to take as many pictures as we do today. On a roll of film there were only 24 to 36 exposures. Here's the thing: when you took a picture you really meant it. It had to be meaningful. You didn't take selfies. If you wanted a selfie you looked in the mirror because film was expensive. Why? Because a person needed to develop it. Someone had to take those pictures on the film inside that canister into a room and do a special process to develop them so that everybody could enjoy them. I miss those days because that's when you got all your beatings as a kid. You would forget that you made that funny face in the picture and your mom would develop them—spending like ten dollars on that picture—only to see you making an ugly face. Now we just delete them. There's no cost to it.

Film development is like discipleship development. We need to take what's on the inside and develop it so that it can be seen, enjoyed and embraced by those on the outside. When we took a picture back in the day it would go into that canister and stay there until someone went through the process of exposing it. As Christians we have made the decision at some point in our lives to follow the teachings and ways of Jesus Christ. That is usually a private, personal decision. It's done between you and God. Discipleship is drawing out and developing something that has happened on the inside so that others may see it and be impacted by it. We want to develop disciples—people who have made a decision for Christ—by exposing and developing what it means to live, love and serve Christ, proclaiming His goodness in all that we do.

To do this, we as a church have been given the task of creating an environment that develops people in that way. It's not always easy because what we have to develop is not only someone to discover Christ but to then develop a deep and close relationship with Him. We need to help development their enjoyment of Who Christ is and the deep impact of what is involved in a relationship with Christ.

So how do we fulfill this vision? We've got to find out what the Word of God says about discipleship and apply it. Let's look at Luke 14 and start to understand what it means to develop disciples for the glory of God. Jesus preaches a sermon in our text that will help us understand not only what it means to be a disciple but the cost that comes with it. Luke 14:25–35:

²⁵Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶If 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. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

³⁴"Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

In this passage we learn that if we are going to be a church that is successful in developing disciples we need to do some things. There are some things that need to be part of our DNA. When Jesus speaks about discipleship, He speaks with very firm words. They aren't suggestions or ideas. Jesus is speaking in the most serious way possible. When we talk about discipleship we're not talking about something we've created or thought up. We are hearing from the mind and heart of Jesus Christ. This is from Jesus' own mouth. This is the business of Christ. He came to this earth to seek and to save sinners (Luke 19:10) and to make them His disciples (Matthew 28:19).

1. Challenging the Status Quo

A crowd of consumers

In order for discipleship to become a reality we need to recognize a couple of things. First of all we need to recognize that if we're going to make disciples then it's going to involve this church challenging the status quo. Let's look at the text again. Luke is the author of this Gospel and he shares things in great detail that might be missed by any other observer. Luke says this about Jesus: *"Now great crowds accompanied him"* (verse 25). This is a fact that Luke is going to say many times. This is a fact that's going to be seen in the other Gospels as well. Jesus had great crowds assembled around Him. They were there because they liked what Jesus was doing. He was a popular figure and Teacher. He healed the sick and exorcised demons. He had great arguments with the Pharisees. Who didn't like to see someone argue with the Pharisees? The crowds were immense—sometimes thousands in number—and they loved to see what Jesus was doing. They wanted to be in a crowd. They wanted to observe all that He was doing.

What preacher wouldn't be happy to preach and lead a large growing number of people? Isn't that how we judge churches? When we drive by a small, A-frame church with a little sign and a parking lot that only holds a couple dozen cars, we assume right away that church is behind the times. That church isn't getting the job done. But then we drive by a major intersection and see a big church—acres of parking, big signs, amazing architecture, everything looks cutting-edge—and right away we say, "They must be doing something right. They must have a corner on the truth. Why would all those people go to that church if they aren't teaching the truth?" We assume with size comes health and truth. We assume that with fancy things comes a foundation of truth and what we should be doing, then we judge churches based on that. A large church means that things are going well. When we see big buildings, big budgets, and big attendance rolls we assume that everything is going as it should.

So why would pastors and churches not want great crowds to accompany them? Here Jesus, the quintessential Pastor, knew that He attracted people. But He knew something about the people who were attracted to Him: they were attracted for all the wrong reasons. So what does He do? He challenges the crowd.

There's a tendency as pastors (and as human beings) to embrace the crowds. This is a battle that I struggle with all the time. As our church has grown it is easy for me to embrace it and say, "Well, I must be doing something right because a lot more people are coming than when I first started. This must be my stamp of approval." But Jesus reminds us that real ministry is not found in numbers but in changed lives.

Numerous times Jesus preached what we would call "Operation Crowd Reduction" sermons. As a preacher, one of my favorite parts of the Bible is John 5 and 6 where Jesus has an incredible moment. Things are really taking off for Him. There are 5,000 people listening to Jesus preach and He goes for a long time. Jesus preached for hours. So when you get tired of Pastor Tim just remember I'm doing a fraction of what Jesus did. He preached so long that you could hear the collective grumbling of people's stomachs. Jesus said, "That's not good. We've got to feed them. There's nothing more holy than a preacher who caters so let's do that."

So what does He do? He takes a couple fish and some loaves of bread and He starts multiplying them. He feeds the 5,000 and the 5,000 are exclaiming, "This Guy doesn't just preach, He prepares good food. This is amazing! We're going to come back for more." So they come back the next day. "What are you going to do for us now, Jesus? We've come for You to fill our bellies. What trick are you going to do? Show us that example of power. Wow us with Your oratorical skills. Do something for us. We're here for the show." And Jesus says in John 6, "Alright. You want to hang with Me? You want to follow Me? You've got to eat My flesh and drink My blood." "I don't think so, Jesus. Wait a minute. Where's the food? Where's the pyrotechnics, Jesus? We were here yesterday and saw it."

People became enamored with the show Jesus instead of the Savior Jesus. They were enamored with the Leader Who did everything for them and excited them instead of the Leader they were called to follow. So Jesus said, "You're going to have to

take all of Me. You will have to eat all of Me. You can't just have the part of Me that makes you feel good. You can't just have the part of Me that fills your bellies. You also have to take the part that's going to cost you dearly."

Remember, when they counted people back in the day, they only counted men. So that 5,000 count was probably closer to 20,000. This was a mega-church. Jesus had a mega-church for one day because when He said, "Eat My flesh and drink My blood," the Bible says the crowds left Him. They left Him. Ten percent? Nope. Twenty percent? Nope. Half? Nope. All but 12. The disciples looked at Him and they were thinking, "I'm not sure that we bought into the right thing here." In John 6 Jesus asked this question because He knew what they were thinking: "*Do you want to go away as well?*" (John 6:67). To which the disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit said, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*" (verse 68).

Committed contributors

Jesus preached a sermon to the crowd so that He could have time with the twelve disciples. He scared off the crowd so that He could minister to His disciples. Churches have it all messed up. We preach to the crowd so that we can keep the crowd. We lower our message so that the thousands will stay. Jesus shows us that He is not One Who is going to live for the crowd. He challenges the crowd of consumers so that they might become committed contributors. He preached against the crowd. He said, "You can't hang around with Me." Three times in this passage Jesus says, "You cannot be My disciple." So this Jesus Who loves the world and says, "Come to Me," also says, "There are conditions to your coming. You cannot live for self and have Me as your Savior. You cannot be My disciple." He says this three times. Sadly, in so many American church pews, seats are filled with consumers, not disciples. They seek Jesus for the things He will do for them. They pursue churches to meet their needs and preferences and make them happy. And then we label those churches as innovative for making people comfortable in their place of consumer Christianity.

Here's consumer Christianity: you are always right because it is about your ideals and desires. But Jesus was different. He wasn't fooled by large crowds. He knew that people followed Him for superficial reasons. He knew even among His 12 there was one, Judas, who was not a true follower. Like a surgeon, He pinpointed the cancer and extracted it. He recognized that people were there because it was the exciting place to be. If our text had ended with Jesus having had large crowds accompanying Him, we might think that that's how we know our work is approved by God. If it's big it must be right. But Jesus sought to make the consumers very uncomfortable. He didn't mince any words. He said, "You're not going to like My sermon if you're not willing to do what I say."

Here's the problem: in a growing church like this it's hard to distinguish between the crowd and the committed. Here's one way to do it: preach sermons that make people uncomfortable. Make whom uncomfortable? The crowd. A person in the crowd is one who speaks from a selfish perspective. "What is Christ going to do for me? What does that church have for me?" When you're the consumer you're the expert as to what ministry should look like. If you're the standard you will leave this place today and you will say, "It would have been more worshipful if they had sung these songs." "If the leader in our class would have done this then maybe my kids might have enjoyed it more." "If they would serve a different kind of coffee I might be a little more excited." "If we didn't have to sit on pews but had those theater chairs I might be more attentive." When you're thinking and processing church in that way you're processing it as a consumer, not as a follower of Jesus Christ. Here's why: when Christ becomes the standard, all of that gets pushed away. It's about Christ. It's about His work. My perspectives and prerogatives decrease so that Christ may increase.

So what do we take away from this first statement, "*Now great crowds accompanied him?*"

- Takeaway number one: large numbers are not inherently bad. Our church has almost tripled in size in the last ten years. Is that a bad thing? No, it's not a bad thing. But large numbers are a great cover for people who have little desire to live for Christ. You can be anonymous. One takeaway: we will never die on a hill of making the church larger for number's sake.
- Second (and some will gulp at this): we're going to make it really hard for you to just hang around here. We don't want people to be comfortable. Comfort is the greatest enemy to Christianity. Now, I'm not saying that there's no joy in Christianity. I'm not saying that there aren't times that we celebrate. But Jesus says, "Carry your cross." Do you know what a cross was? It was an execution device. So if Jesus is using that terminology, do you think churches are doing it right when they make people feel comfortable where they are? That is a lie of devil.

You say, “Tim, are you being hard on churches?” Let me help you out. Ten years ago one of the largest mega-churches in the country had an epiphany. They were attracting thousands on weekends. They were one of the most innovative churches in the world. They came to a point where they said, “We need to evaluate, because what we thought would be the end result isn’t happening.” So ten years ago they embarked on the largest single survey that a church has ever done in human history, as far as anyone knows. They asked the question, “Based on our premise of doing ministry that focuses the church experience on making everyone comfortable and making Christ accessible in very practical ways to our attendees, while focusing on the felt needs of the individual instead of calls of greater commitment, what did our ministry accomplish?” Here’s what they said, “It enabled us to build bigger buildings and have greater programs, but it failed at making any real change in the lives of people for their God.” Those are their words, not mine. The senior pastor of that church got up and said, “We have failed you. We have to be about making disciples and there’s nothing comfortable about that.”

2. Connecting People with Its Demands

We’ve got to battle Satan’s ploys that keep us sitting on the sidelines as Christians. Going about your lives as if Christ doesn’t matter is unbiblical. It will rob you of all joy that God desires you to have. Challenging people is one thing though. We could challenge people but what do we have to do as a church? Jesus doesn’t just say, “I hate crowds! Get out of here.” He says, “For those who are serious and want to be with Me, here’s what it involves.” A church must connect people with discipleship commands. What is it demanding?

Jesus garners the attention of the crowd. He moves to the core of what discipleship is. In one phrase He sums up discipleship: you’ve got to count the costs (verse 28). If there’s anything that irritates me as a pastor it’s the idea that has become so pronounced in our evangelical circles that you can be a Christian and do nothing to show it. I read an article this week in the Huffington Post titled, “I am a Christian but disagree with most of what Jesus taught.” We laugh. We scoff. We say, “How could you say that?” But this is how many of us live each and every day. “I’m a Christian but I’m not sure about this whole discipleship thing.” “I’m a Christian but I don’t really need to go to church.” “I’m a Christian but I don’t need to look at how I give, talk and walk with other people.”

That kind of thinking—“I can be a Christian and not do what Jesus taught”—Paul uses the Greek word *skubala* to describe it, which literally means poop. That’s what it is. Paul says, “This is all rubbish.” Jesus tells us in three verses in our text, “You cannot say you’re one of My disciples and not do what I say. You can’t.” Before you start saying, “I’m a Christian but I’m not a disciple,” know that the New Testament never makes that distinction. If you’re a Christian then you’re a disciple. It’s one and the same.

Worship

So notice the things He’s talking about. Jesus makes it clear: “You want to be with Me and enjoy the blessing of walking with Me? Then it involves carrying your cross, which involves pain, suffering and humiliation at times. It’s going to cost you something.” This means we have to evaluate some things. First we need to evaluate our worship. In verse 26 He says, “If My relationship with you is second to any earthly relationship you’ve got a problem.” *“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.”* That had to have shocked people. “You want me to hate the lady standing next to me? She’s my wife! You want me to hate my kids?” Jesus is using a Hebraic use of exaggeration. It’s exaggeration for a point. He’s saying, “I come first. I’m number one. I should be first in such a pronounced way that anybody who looks at how you respond to Me might think that you hate everybody else.” He’s saying, “I am the preference, priority and focus.”

As a Christian you ask, “Does Jesus literally mean that?” No. Jesus is not literally saying we must hate, because to do so would contradict everything He said. We’re called to love our spouses and children. We’re called to have love for our families. We’re called to love our neighbors and our enemies. Jesus is saying, “I want to be number one. If I am number one, those who are two, three, four and five will be loved even better.”

Amanda doesn’t want to be number one in my life because if she’s number one I’m going to fail her. But when Christ is number one and my love for Amanda reflects Christ’s love for His bride, the church—that I’m willing to lay down my life and do all that I must to love my wife in the way that Christ loves His church—then Amanda is going to love being number two. And my children will love being number three. The church will love being number four.

Some of us struggle to be part of a church and be disciples because we can't get ourselves off the pedestal. Our love for ourselves and our love of comfort is so number one that anybody who tries to knock that off the pedestal will make us angry. Who are we worshipping? Is it earthly relationships? If discipleship is to have an impact Jesus needs to be number one.

Work

In verses 28–30 Jesus moves on from the worship of a disciple to the work of a disciple. He says:

²⁸ "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?
²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

Jesus then speaks about a guy who is building a tower. Here are two things that I know about building: 1) It rarely gets done on time and 2) It almost always goes over budget. There is great fun in dreaming. The best part of the building project is the designing of it. It doesn't cost you anything. That's why some of you are given to watching Home and Garden television because you can dream all these dreams and then go back to where you live and it's wonderful. Anybody can dream because it doesn't cost anything. Here's the problem though: Jesus tells us that if we're going to be His disciples there is a long run to it. You need to make sure that you understand the hidden costs of construction.

When we built our new addition onto the church we were young and dumb. As elders we thought we could build a building as cheaply as possible but still getting lots of bang for our buck. The city kept coming and adding costs and we would have to come back to the congregation and say, "It's going to cost us more." Why? Because there were hidden costs. We would have to keep asking the congregation, "Are we willing to pay the cost for the building we need?" We had to count the costs because there are hidden costs in buildings.

There are also hidden costs in the Christian life. It's easy for us to say, "I'm all for Jesus" in the worship center, or when the preacher says "Come on down!", or when we're playing the hymn for the umpteenth time and tears are rolling down your face. But the unseen costs are on that random Wednesday when God says, "You can't live that way anymore, Tim. I demand all your time, talents, treasures, and testimony."

"But God, I didn't see that in the design. I didn't see that I was going to have to live differently: say no to certain entertainments, say no to certain things. I didn't know I was going to have to do that."

Jesus says, "If you're going to be My disciple there are going to be hidden costs. I'm not hiding them from you but they're hidden because you haven't thought this all the way through."

That's why we are very cautious about saying, "Who wants to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Just come forward! It's nice and easy. You don't have to do anything. It's just between you and God." There is some truth to that but we handicap people because we say that there's nothing they have to worry about after that. "You've got your get-out-of-jail-free card," but then when it gets tough they say, "This isn't what I signed up for." Jesus says it's going to be hard. Count the costs.

War

Jesus uses a war analogy. He says, "When a general is heading into battle he has to count the cost. 'Do I have enough to win the war? If I don't, I need to go a different direction.'" This reminds us of three truths surrounding discipleship.

1. We have to ask the question, "Do I have what I need to accomplish the task before me?" A general has to ask, "Can I win this war?" A disciple will answer that question with a resounding, "No! I can't do it without You, God. So I'm giving my life to You and placing myself under Your authority because I can't win this war on my own. I need You in my life."
2. Am I willing to accomplish the task whatever it takes? The general says, "I'm going to war and my job isn't to shake hands with the other guys but to decimate them. Am I willing to do that? Am I willing to shed blood for what I'm going to fight over? If I'm not, I better make a peace treaty because it's not worth it." Here's the question: am I willing to give the blood, sweat and tears it will cost me? If I'm not, then I better make some other arrangements because it's not worth it.
3. I need to recognize this is an either all-in or all-out proposition. "Either I'm going to war or I'm signing a peace treaty." Those two are diametrically opposed to one another. So we need to ask ourselves, "Am I in or am I out? Am I willing to go to war for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom or am I going to sign a treaty with the devil and say, 'It's not worth the battle. I've counted the costs and I don't see a reason to go to war.'"

Witness

Finally He talks about our witness. In verses 34–35 He talks about salt. Salt is good for flavoring, preserving and disinfecting. *“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* He says, “What about your witness?” He’s saying if salt doesn’t do what it’s intended to do then it’s of no value. We don’t use salt like we used to now that we have refrigeration, but here’s another way of thinking about it: Have you ever chewed a piece of gum that’s lost its flavor? What do you do with it? Throw it away. Why waste your time? If it doesn’t have flavor you get rid of it. A disciple who is not living a disciple’s life is worthless.

If you’re here and you’re just going through the motions and this is just simply a religious activity, you’re wasting your time. It’s no good for you or for others. So what do we do? As a church we’re going to help you day in and day out to count the costs. We’re going to remind you that the Christian life, while it isn’t easy, is the greatest place a person can find himself. Being a disciple at times will have you second-guessing because it’s hard work but in endurance is where we find joy.

3. Committing to a Particular Model of Ministry

So how do we do it? We’re going to commit to a particular kind of ministry. Now that we know what disciples are, how do we make them? The same way Jesus did. The goal of Village Bible Church is to follow the pattern of Jesus. He had a three-fold pattern.

Interaction

Number one: that pattern involved interaction. Jesus spent three and a half years with His disciples. He walked with them, He talked with them, He lived life with them, and He hung out with them throughout the entire day. They went through good and bad times together. They lived in community with one another and their interaction was intimate. They loved one another. They still had disagreements and issues but they loved one another. Village Bible Church needs to be a church where we create an environment not for people to just come and go for services, but where people see how essential it is to have our walk with God be in the context of community with other believers. So everything we do is done so that we can live life together and show one another what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ. We do church ministry and fellowship so that we might help one another be more like Christ.

Instruction

Number two: this is a ministry of instruction. Jesus taught them. He spent lots of time teaching them on a myriad of issues. He taught them about a relationship with God. He taught them about relationships with one another. He taught them about relationships with their enemies, their families, and strangers. He spoke on their relationships with themselves and their battle with sin. Jesus taught them how to follow God in the good times and the bad times. Jesus spoke to their questions. He challenged their dysfunctions. He addressed their hatreds and taught them how to love.

As a church we must be committed to this type of teaching ministry where we teach on all sorts of issues. We can’t be afraid of teaching the hard stuff. We can’t be so angry that we don’t teach the good stuff. We need to teach in all ways. Jesus taught in large crowds, small groups, and one-on-one. We need to teach in all these ways. The vast majority of His teaching was done in a group of 12 and that’s why we think small groups are so important to this church. It’s in that small group of people where Christ can uniquely speak and we can help one another with what Christ is calling us to do.

Imitation

So it’s interaction and instruction. It’s also imitation. Jesus came to this earth, put on flesh, and made His dwelling among us. Why? So we could see what God looks like with flesh on? No. So that we might know how we ought to live as flesh and blood. Jesus showed us the perfect example of what it means to be obedient, even to death on a cross. He showed us what it means to obey even when you don’t feel like it as Jesus did in the garden. His humanity cried out, “I don’t want to die!” (Mark 14:36). Jesus showed us and He said, “Imitate My example.”

We imitate Christ so that we might help others see Who Christ is. The elders’ job is to be men whom you can imitate so as you imitate them you’re imitating Christ. Your elders aren’t perfect. They’re not your savior. Your mentors aren’t the ones who went to the cross to die for you. We have one Savior, Jesus Christ. Our job in our finiteness and fallibility is to imitate Christ. As Paul said, *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1). We can’t imitate Christ perfectly but we’re to be examples.

This is seen in the New Testament over and over again in the admonition for older men and older women to be examples to younger men and women as they imitate Christ. So our discipleship is happening even when we're not teaching. Fathers, your discipleship of your children is as they're watching you. Hopefully they're seeing Christ in all you do. The same thing goes for you, Moms. Elders, are they seeing Christ? Yes, we'll fail at times. But are we living such lives that we could say, "If you imitate me you're going to draw closer to God?" Discipleship is about imitation. Jesus said when a student is fully taught he will become like his Teacher (Matthew 10:24–25).

4. Celebrating its Progress Along the Way

So what do we do on this journey? It's not an easy one but we should celebrate its progress along the way. Why would we buy into this? This is so much less fun than just letting people be comfortable and building big ministries. So what do we do? Why would we celebrate? We celebrate because we see the advancements that the gospel makes in people's lives. We recognize a couple of things that God is doing in our midst.

God is completing what He started

If we pursue this vision of discipleship we can celebrate the fact that God will always complete what He started. Philippians 1:6 says, *"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* If you give yourself to this thing called discipleship, God says your toiling will not be done in vain. He'll complete it. When you stand before Jesus He'll be able to say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21). He's faithful to complete it.

God is giving us all we need to support this vision

We give ourselves a vision of discipleship because God gives us all we need to support this vision. God says that we have all that we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). So discipleship is life and godliness together. God says, *"You've got all that you need."* So we don't have to go fund a million-dollar project to be able to accomplish this. We don't need to have the best staff preachers in the world to make this happen. God says, *"Normal, everyday people have exactly what they need. Village Bible Church, you have all that you need to accomplish this task of making disciples. You can do it."* So we don't have lack. We have all that we need.

God has shown us this strategy works

Finally, God has shown us that this strategy works. 2,000 years ago Jesus worked with a group of men, and that group of men started working with other people, and that group of people started working with other people, and those people others, and so on until you get all the way to the 21st century to a little town called Sugar Grove. 2,000 years after Jesus uttered these words, His discipleship is working because this place is filled with people who have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ. It works!

So why would the church focus on anything else except the strategy that works: discipleship? The same discipleship that God's calling you to was what He called the Apostle Peter to: *"Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Matthew 16:24). If you do that God says there is blessing and joy. While the road is hard, there is no greater place than to be a disciple of Jesus. Will you join us in that journey? Will you pick up your cross and count the costs? We want you to be part of it because when we do that God changes not only our lives but also the lives of the world around us.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.net).