



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

FOLLOW ME: WHAT'S NEXT?

Matthew 11:25–30

Tim Badal | August 20, 2023

We're between two series. We just finished "Follow Me" last week; then our new series kicking off in September will be "Rediscover Church." We're going to learn why church is so important. After Covid and all the turmoil it brought not only to our lives, but to churches as well, I think a lot of us have forgotten the real importance church has. We've forgotten why we do this thing called church. What's the spiritual significance? What does it mean for me? What am I part of when I "do" church?

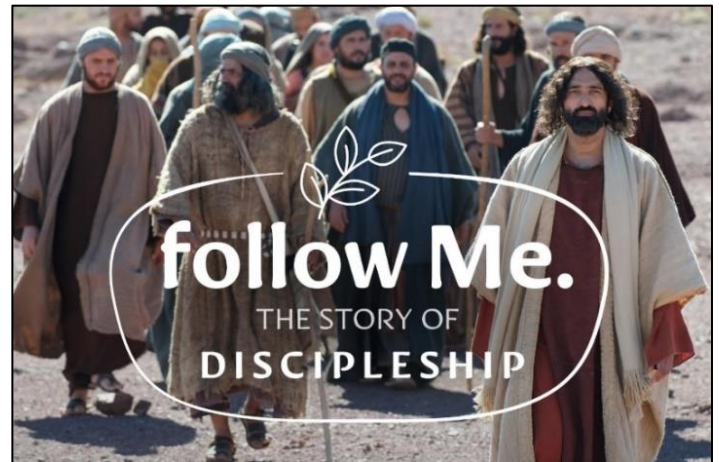
So this fall, we're going to study what it means to be a part of the church and why the church is so necessary to our lives. But before we do, we have a couple weeks between these series. I don't know if it was Pastor Phil's message about "The Rest of the Story," but I felt like it was important for us to talk about "What's Next." When I talk about what's next on the heels of studying and learning from the lives of the disciples and how they followed Christ—the mistakes they made and the great strides they made toward being faithful to Jesus—it begs the question: how do we follow Jesus? Here in the 20th century, in middle America, what does following Jesus involve for us? It's easy to look at others from afar and say, "Yeah, I get it, but what about us?" Are we following Jesus to the fullest extent God commands us to. Right away, we think of discipleship as an internal thing. "How am I doing with following Christ?" That's part of it. We should be examining our lives and asking, "Am I truly following Christ?"

But to be a follower of Christ means we are involved in the same ministry Jesus was. Our title for the summer has been "Follow Me." Jesus spoke these words numerous times. In fact, He told some of His first disciples, "Follow Me and.." What's next? "I will make you fishers of men. I will use you. I will equip you. I'm going to encourage you, not to keep what you have found in Me, but to share it with others."

So this morning, there are a couple things I want to declare. First of all, I think it's important to ask what is a disciple? We've used this definition before: A disciple is a person who proactively learns, passionately loves and purposely lives according to the pattern of Jesus Christ. What a great evaluating tool this definition is. We should be asking, "Am I proactively learning what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Thinking back on this week, what steps did I take to becoming a better follower of Jesus Christ?"

I can assure you the best way we can do this is through His Word and through prayer. "Am I involved in these things? Is this knowledge and understanding something I long for? Am I passionately loving? Am I on fire when it comes to my love for Jesus, my love for His Word and my love for the world He's created? Am I purposely living according to the pattern Jesus called me? Am I following in Jesus' footsteps?"

In order for us to fulfill that last part, we need to be on a journey of discovering new disciples. In fact, Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28 that they were to go. They were to be deployed to find new disciples, teaching them and baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They were to go out into the world to do these things, not stopping until every person has heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is our calling too. So following Jesus isn't just for us; it is so we can go and discover those who need Him. That's what I want to talk about this morning. Are we in the business of discovering new disciples?



We love discovering. We celebrate discovering. We celebrate the discoveries of the explorers who found new lands that become new worlds available to us. We love medical discoveries that save lives and take away hurts and hardships for entire groups of people. We love the discoveries we find in the stars, whether it's through a telescope or men on the moon. We love discovering new places in God's creation that we never thought we would see or touch or land on. In our sports world, we love discovering new ways to beat the White Sox. We love discovering.

There's something glorious about discovering, but I want you to know today that it's not just new lands, new worlds, new medicines. The greatest discovery—in fact the greatest thing in this world according to Jesus—is the reason He came into this world: to seek and save those who were lost. This seeking and saving involves discovering. In fact, when someone discovers the gospel, the Bible tells us all the angelic household in heaven throws a party because they are so excited to witness this. So the very essence of us following Jesus is to join in this journey of discovering disciples. But how do we do this? What does it involve? What needs to change in our lives for it to take place?

I want to look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 11, starting in verse 28. These are some of the grandest words our Lord and Savior ever spoke to a needy and hurting people when He said, *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden"—some translations say 'weary' —"and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

This morning I'm going to give you three things to think about—and hopefully to put into practice — regarding what it means to be a follower of Christ Jesus in the sense that you are seeking and finding other followers, specifically inviting other people into a following relationship with Jesus. We are to be the fishers of men He spoke of, the discoverers of men and women who are in need of the gospel.

Disciples seek to discover other disciples by...

Seeing their situation.

First, we need to see others' situations as God sees them. Over and over again, the Bible tells us that Jesus "looked up." Throughout the Gospels you'll see numerous times when He looked up. On one occasion it says Jesus looked up and saw the crowds. When He saw the crowds, He saw that they were hurting and harassed people, like sheep without a shepherd. Our text today says He looked up, saw the people; notice how He diagnosed them. They were people who labored, who were heaven laden. They were people who were weary. They were people who were longing for rest.

I want to pause here and ask you when was the last time you lifted your eyes to look at the world around you? In other words, when have you looked at your sphere of influence—your family, your neighborhood, your workplace, the unique place where God has you? Are your eyes up? Are you seeing the world around you? Can you diagnose what ails the people around you?

Numerous times Jesus looked up to see the people and every time He did, He did not give a good picture. Instead, He gave a sad picture. In those moments when He saw they were harassed and hurting, sheep without a shepherd, literally it says He had deep compassion for them. He felt sorry for them. He empathized with them.

If we're going to discover disciples, we need to empathize and sympathize with those who are living life around us who don't know Jesus. To do that, we need to recognize it's not us versus them. We too were lost. We too were once disobedient. We too were once sinners outside of God's Kingdom. Let it never be said of us that we've been saved so long that we forget what we were saved from.

Here Jesus said these people were hurting and weary. They couldn't find satisfaction. That was true in the first century. It was true in the '60s when Mick Jagger said, "I can't get no satisfaction. I try, I try, I try, but I can't." We know that in this world we can't find it. These people were weary, looking for that satisfaction, pursuing that satisfaction, but never finding it.

I love what C.S. Lewis says: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, then the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." We've done a whole series on the book of Ecclesiastes—the study of a man's journey to find satisfaction in the power, prestige, pleasures and promotions of this world. The author concluded that all of it is chasing after the wind.

So the answer to this malady is not found in this world; it's found in Jesus Christ. This means we know the answer. We have the answer. The Bible says we have this treasure we've received from God Himself. The problem is we're not looking at the people around us. Even if we did, we don't look any different than they do. We're compromised. We're just as broken and beat up as they are.

The crazy thing is, even before we preach the gospel, we need to live it out. The gospel first needs to live in our lives, because we realize we ourselves once were where they are. Often we see their sin, debauchery and disobedience, then we'll end up doing what the Pharisees did: create distance between them and us. We'll build fences. We think, "I want to be careful to stay holy, so I need to separate myself from unbelievers." If that is my attitude, then when I'm around that person, I can't get past their sin and disobedience. As a result, I separate myself from them. But notice that this approach is foreign to the Scriptures.

What if Jesus had said, "Come to Me, all you morons. Come to Me, all you sinners. Come to Me, all you ignorant. Come to Me, all who have screwed up their lives, so I can tell you what you've done wrong, so I can point out your failures, so I can tell you how decrepit you really are. Come to Me, so I can show you how wrong you are and how right I am." Do you see this mindset is antithetical to what Jesus actually said? When we look up, we aren't looking up with our own eyes. That's what the Pharisees did. We need to look up with Jesus' eyes. That's hard to do at times.

Many of you know I also serve as caterer which has taken me to a great many places. One of my customers throws concerts which are of the country music variety, so my company has served dozens of the biggest names in country music. Years ago. I was catering an event for a country music star named Billy Ray Cyrus. Many of you recall "Achy Breaky Heart." I don't know any other songs he sings. Anyway, he was getting ready to have his dinner and doing sound checks with his roadies. I was in back with my staff, cooking on the grill, minding my own business. Then a young girl—maybe seven, eight, nine years old—was running around. She saw the smoke from the grill and started up a conversation with me. She was asking all kinds of questions, as young people do. I learned a little bit about her, as she was readily telling me her dad was a really important man, that thousands of people were coming to hear her dad sing. She loved going with her dad and mom on all these tours.

Well, maybe you've figured this out already in light of last week's "the rest of the story." This young girl was Miley Cyrus. Now fast forward several these years. Miley's life is a wreck. She's filled with all kinds of foolish decisions, pursuing the world. I see her on national television giving herself to all kinds of shameful things. But here's the thing I do with Miley that I don't do with a lot of other people in Hollywood. When I see Miley, I go back to those 15-20 minutes I shared with her and I'm filled with compassion. I remember what she was and know deep down inside that innocent young lady went on a detour. God created her for something more than what she's pursuing right now. So when I see her on television doing all kinds of ungodly things, my heart is to pray for her. I see her as a person made in the image and likeness of God, whom God longs to have a relationship with.

That's the kind of compassion we ought to have. But we put the person's sin in front of them and create distance. But when we realize they were created in the image and likeness of God, when we have some level of relationship with them, we can begin to sympathize and empathize with them. We start seeing them as a soul in need of a Savior. Jesus saw hurting, harassed and helpless people. He saw people who were weary and heavy-laden. So He invited them, "Come. Come to Me." This is the same invitation many of us have heard, finding in Jesus the words of life. Jesus says we are to take that same message to the world. We've got to see it.

So are you looking up? Are you seeing the situation the unbelieving world is in? Are you filled with judgment, or are you filled with compassion?

Sharing the gospel.

This compassion will lead us to the second thing which is to share the gospel. St. Francis of Assisi said, "Share the gospel, and if you must, use words." I like the premise of that statement, but it's kind of like Swiss cheese; it's got holes in it. We have to share words. The important thing he's trying to communicate, however, is that we often share the words but not the posture. So before we can share the gospel in words, we have to ask, "Would anybody buy what we're advertising, when they look at our lives?" I'm not saying we need to be a bunch of Stepford Wives, having everything just perfect and everything in place. But when people in our communities, workplaces and family who don't know Jesus look at us, do they see something different in us? Do they see the

joy of finding what we were looking for? Do they know we were broken, but that we've found the riches of Christ? Do they know we were dead, but have found life in Christ? We've found what we were looking for.

Do you go to the world with that kind of joy, with that kind of excitement, so in every conversation people say, "I don't know what's up with that person, but they love life. It seems as if every day is a gift to them." I'll tell you what: that's what the world is looking for. They don't know Jesus. They don't know what Jesus offers us. So we need to begin by looking like the changed people we are.

I love how the disciples were described by the religious leaders in Acts 4: they were unlearned men but they had been with Jesus. When you go to work, do people know you've been with Jesus? When you go to school, do people know you've been with Jesus? Do you exude Jesus? Listen brothers and sisters, I work in the world. I live in the world. At times it is hard to exude Jesus, but this is what we're called to.

Now, hist also means sharing the gospel in words. So what does that mean? It means we share our desperation: "I too was lost. I too was weary. I too was heavy laden. I too was burdened." We share our story: "I too was lost, but I found Jesus. I'm no longer miserable. I'm no longer searching/ Now the joy of the Lord is my strength. I found what I needed and His name is Jesus." So in this way, you begin to communicate, "The reason why I am the way I am is not of myself, but it's a gift of God. I can't boast about this."

Many pastors have put it this way: "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." It's sharing, "Friend, I was hungry, then I found the bread of heaven and it is satisfying my soul. I cannot do anything but exclaim in every part of my life what Jesus means to me."

Brothers and sisters, do we carry this kind of passion to the world around us? Once we start preaching the gospel, if they don't see that kind of passion, they'll say, "Well, why would I exchange one kind of miserable life for another?" Some of us preach about joy with grumbling voices. I don't want that; I have enough of that in my life. What I'm looking for is the abundant life that Jesus offers in John 10. That's what your fellow workers want. That's what your schoolmates want. That's what your neighbors want. They may not know the name behind it, but they're longing for that. So we tell them Jesus came and is now inviting them, "Come to Me. You're burdened and weary and heavy laden. Come to Me."

Notice the promise He gives: "*I will give...*" He doesn't say, "I might give or I could give." He says, "I will give you rest. I will take care of what ails you. I will give you what you've been looking for." This is what they need. So we go to people and say, "Come to Jesus. He will give you rest. He will give the love you need. The forgiveness you need. The grace you need. He will give it all fully and eternally."

Let's just stop for a moment and ask, as you look up from your life, who in your life needs Jesus? You in your life needs to discover Jesus? Write down their name. Put it in your head and on your heart. Pray, "Lord, I want to see this person come to know You."

As I was leaving the second service, a gentleman stopped me. With tears in his eyes, he said, "I had the opportunity this week to share Jesus with two people." By his tears, I could see the heartfelt compassion he had for these people. He asked me to pray for them, then he asked me what his next steps should be. So now I also have compassion for those people.

Who in your life needs the gospel? Who in your life is striving to find what they cannot find on their own?

Showing them the way.

Once we share the gospel, we have to show them the way. Notice that Jesus says, "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:29-30). Twice in our passage we get this word "yoke." Jesus is not ordering eggs. He's telling us what followership is all about.

Maybe when He was preaching this, there were some oxen there that were yoked together. A yoke is a wooden harness that was used up until about 100 years ago by farmers to take two animals and in essence make them one. Jesus says, "I want to put a yoke on you and it will accomplish two things. First, it will serve as an identity helper. When you yoke two animals together, you no longer see them as two—you see them as one. They were a team. As we yoke ourselves to Jesus, we show people what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We are identifying with Him. We identify with Him in His life, His death, His burial and His resurrection. We also identify Him as the only Savior for our souls. This means that when people see us, they also see Jesus.

Again, I'm asking myself this question first: when people see me, do they see Jesus? Do they see Jesus in you? Are you showing them what it means to be identified with Jesus?

Second, this yoke speaks of imitating Him. Many times farmers would yoke an older and wiser animal—a seasoned animal—next to an immature one so that animal would learn its ways. When you're yoked to another, you start watching what the other does. Jesus is saying, "I want you to yoke yourself with Me. My yoke is easy and the burden is light." Why? Because He's carrying the weight for us. Notice that He also says, *"...and learn from Me..."* As followers of Jesus Christ, we're imitating Him so that we will learn how to walk and work and live our lives like He would. In this way, people will be able to see Jesus in us.

This is what we're calling people to. We're calling them to identify with Christ, to make Him their Lord and Savior. We're calling them to imitate Him and purposefully follow Him. Why should we do this? Because here is where we'll find rest for our souls. We no longer have to labor. We no longer have to work. We no longer have to live under rules and regulations that say to us, "If you try hard enough, you just might pass the test." No, we are yoking ourselves with the One Who aced the test, Jesus Christ Himself. We're saying, "I identify with Him, resting in His goodness, grace and deliverance." This is what we're to take to the world.

Some important action steps

So let's do a rundown of things we need to understand in this endeavor.

Acknowledge that God alone changes lives.

Do you realize that the most vile and disobedient person in your world can be changed by Jesus in a New York minute? He did it with the apostle Paul. He did it with Peter, James and John. He did it with you and me. So we need to understand that God can do this work; He's the only one who can do it. If we believe God is all powerful, then we know He can change lives. And He longs to do this, using us in that process.

Ask God for opportunities.

When was the last time you went to the Lord and started listing people by name? "God, would You allow me to have an impact in John's life? Would You allow me to have an impact in Sally's life? Would You allow me to have an impact in so-and-so's life? Lord, I'm asking for opportunities to do this. So this week, Lord, will You give me opportunities?"

Abandon Christian isolation.

I love that this church is growing. I love that we welcome in new members. I love that we're able to start new ministries. But one of the fears I have as a pastor, as the church grows, is that we will have everything we need within these four walls: relationships, friendships, programs, community life. Because of this, I fear that we will abandon our communities and interactions with non-believers. That we'll just have parties with people who are already believers. That we will stop discovering the people God has brought into our lives who need Jesus.

Be spiritually active in your community.

That means we've got to be spiritually active in our communities. I appreciate the teachers, board members, volunteers, coaches and the community people who are active in their communities, not just to make the communities better in a temporal way, but in an eternal way. Does your community recognize you as an asset, that you're bringing Jesus to them, even if they don't know it?

Look for unique avenues to make inroads.

Are you looking for unique avenues to make inroads? A young pastor recently reached out to me and asked, "What can I learn about being a pastor?" He focused on preaching and I appreciate that. I love preaching. We talked a lot about a phrase preachers use: we need to 'exegete the text.' That means we dig into the text, allowing the text to be the basis of our message. We seek to understand why this particular text was written and what it can help us with. The text becomes our goal because we want to teach it right. But as we went on, I said, "It's not just exegeting the text; it's exegeting the community for whom the text is written."

So let me ask when was the last time you exegeted your community? Do you understand who they are and what they're all about? Do you understand their needs and how you might reach them? God says in Acts 17, "I put you in your unique place for a reason. I've given you the unique gifts you have for a reason."

Be available to share the gospel.

So now, knowing my community, I'm going to serve them. I'm going to reach them. And that means I need to be available at all times to share the gospel. Brothers and sisters, we will not follow Jesus well if we're not going and making disciples, if we're not finding them, if we're not discovering them. Jesus has deployed us to discover and make disciples.

We'll learn next week what it means to develop disciples for His glory and for our good. So my hope and prayer is that we will look at the world, that we will look at people differently, then in doing so, that we will be filled with compassion to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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