

Bible Passage**John 15:1-17**

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Outline

1. Remaining in Christ

- a. Discipleship necessitates understanding and adapting to our culture's shift towards individualism, highlighted by the evolution of technology and its impact on communal experiences.
- b. The core of discipleship transcends cultural and temporal boundaries, emphasizing a personal relationship with Jesus. This relationship affirms individual significance while fostering a collective commitment to obey Christ's teachings.
- c. True discipleship involves a balance between recognizing personal worth and conforming to the communal norms of the church, not by losing individual identity but by nurturing a personal relationship with Jesus through humility and willing submission to God's will.

2. Still All About Love

- a. Jesus's unconditional love, demonstrated through his sacrificial death, defines the essence of our faith, highlighting the paradox of being immensely valued by the Creator.
- b. Discipleship extends beyond knowledge acquisition or performing religious duties to embodying Christ's love and sacrifice in our interactions, challenging us to lay down our lives for others.
- c. This sacrificial love is revolutionary, demanding a reevaluation of love as unconditional, challenging us to love the marginalized and broken, thus reflecting Jesus's love through our lives.

3. Obedience Leading to Joy

- a. Obedience in discipleship is about finding joy in living according to God's commandments, as highlighted in Psalm 119, which praises the delight found in God's laws.
- b. The journey of discipleship is marked by a commitment to obey Christ's teachings, not as a burden but as a source of true joy, shifting the focus from self-gain to giving of oneself in service and love.
- c. Discipleship calls for an open heart to God's leading, emphasizing organic, relational ways of making disciples through sharing life and engaging in Scripture, ultimately inviting others into a transformative relationship with Jesus.

Notes

It's evident that our culture has drastically evolved, especially with the prevalence of technology. This evolution has fostered a more individual-centric culture, contrasting sharply with the collective experiences of previous generations. Observations from everyday life, such as how people engage with events like the Super Bowl, reveal a shift towards individual consumption of experiences through personal devices, even in communal settings. This shift has profound implications for discipleship, necessitating an understanding and adaptation to the current cultural.

Discipleship, as drawn from these observations and personal reflections, transcends the boundaries of time and culture. The timeless nature of Jesus's teachings remains relevant, emphasizing personal relationships with Him amidst a culture increasingly focused on individualism. **The Gospel's beauty lies in its ability to speak to each person individually, affirming their unique significance to God while also calling for a collective commitment to His commands.**

The struggle between individualism and the collective nature of the church is evident, especially for millennials who have grown up being told of their specialness, only to face the reality of needing to conform to communal norms. Yet, the Gospel harmonizes these seemingly contradictory messages by affirming personal significance while insisting on obedience and conformity to Christ's teachings as a mark of discipleship. This balance is crucial in understanding and practicing discipleship in a way that respects individual uniqueness while fostering a unified commitment to love and obey Christ.

Discipleship, therefore, is not merely about adhering to a set of rules or losing one's identity in the collective but about nurturing a personal relationship with Jesus, recognizing one's worth to Him, and willingly conforming to His commands out of love. It calls for a denial of self, not in the sense of negating one's significance, but in the pursuit of a life lived in faith and obedience to Christ. This duality of being significant yet called to conform to Christ's image encapsulates the heart of discipleship in the modern era. It's a journey of balancing personal significance with communal commitment, all while navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by a rapidly changing world.

At the heart of my understanding of the Gospel and discipleship is the profound realization of Jesus's unconditional love for us. This love is not just a spoken promise but was demonstrated in the most sacrificial way possible—through Jesus's death on the cross. He endured unimaginable suffering not because He had to, but as a testament to how dearly He values each one of us. The message is clear: we are of immense worth in the eyes of our God, so much so that He would lay down His life for us. This realization is both humbling and uplifting, presenting a paradox that defines the essence of our faith.

Responding to this love involves a radical reorientation of our lives. Galatians 2:20 captures this beautifully by urging us to live not for ourselves but with Christ living in us. This is the cornerstone of discipleship—recognizing our worth to God but choosing to live a life that is no longer centered around our desires but is instead a reflection of Christ within us. It's about humility, a willing submission to God's will, acknowledging our significance while prioritizing His purposes over our own.

In practical terms, this understanding extends into how we approach discipleship and mentorship. True discipleship is not about elevating our status or seeking validation through our contributions or who we mentor. It's about seeing others through Christ's eyes, valuing them as He does, and recognizing that our role is to remain in Him. This connection to Christ is what empowers and guides us to disciple effectively, not our own abilities or insights.

The church, ideally, is a place for the broken, a sanctuary where everyone is welcome and valued, not for their outward appearances or abilities but for their inherent worth in God's eyes. This perspective shifts how we view mentorship and discipleship—it's not about selecting the "best" candidates but about being open to guiding those whom Christ leads us to, regardless of their outward circumstances.

Discipleship emphasizes the personal journey with Christ over the numerical success of our ministries. It's about faithfulness in small things, serving one or two with the same dedication we would serve thousands. This principle has taught me the importance of character over capacity, the value of being rather than doing.

Engaging with the Word of God is central to abiding in Christ. However, this engagement should be more than mere reading. It should be a dynamic, two-way conversation with God, where Scripture serves not just as text but as a mirror reflecting the depths of our souls and the truth of our lives in relation to God's will. This

interaction with the Word is where true transformation and understanding of our role as disciples begin, grounding us in the reality that our strength and guidance come not from ourselves, but from the Lord. This deeper engagement means not just reading for quantity but allowing the text to speak into our lives, revealing truths about ourselves and God's desires for us. The act of reading Scripture should be intertwined with prayer, inviting a dialogue with God rather than a monologue where we simply consume information without transformation.

Understanding discipleship involves recognizing that it's not solely about acquiring knowledge or adhering to a set of practices. True discipleship mirrors Jesus's own actions—laying down one's life for others. This act of self-sacrifice is the pinnacle of discipleship, challenging us to move beyond intellectual assent to the Gospel towards a lived experience of faith, embodying Christ's love and sacrifice in our interactions with others.

The call to discipleship is a call to emulate Christ's love, which is not transactional but unconditional. It's about loving others not because of what they can offer us or how they can reciprocate, but because Christ first loved us. This kind of love is revolutionary in its scope, challenging us to love those who are broken, marginalized, or deemed unworthy by societal standards. It demands a reevaluation of what it means to love and to be a disciple.

Discipleship is not about being the most knowledgeable or impressive person in the room but about how well we love one another. The measure of a disciple is found in their capacity to give of themselves for the benefit of others, reflecting Jesus's sacrificial love. This journey of discipleship is costly, requiring a willingness to lay down our lives in service and love—a concept that goes against the grain of self-preservation and self-promotion.

The process of making disciples and being discipled is rooted in a relationship with God, where both mentor and mentee are learning and growing in faith together. It's not a hierarchical relationship but a mutual journey towards understanding and living out the Gospel. This perspective shifts the focus from a transactional view of discipleship to one that is transformative and relational.

Embracing obedience within the context of modern Christianity challenges us to navigate our culture's emphasis on individual desires and align our lives with Christ's

teachings. This obedience is not about legalistically adhering to rules but finding joy and delight in living according to God's commandments. Psalm 119 underscores the beauty of finding pleasure in God's laws, a concept that resonates deeply with me. It speaks to the transformative power of God's Word in our lives, not as a burden but as a source of true joy.

Discipleship, then, is not merely about accumulating knowledge or performing religious duties but about living out the love and grace we've received from Christ. It's about laying down our lives for others, echoing Jesus's ultimate act of love. This self-sacrifice is the hallmark of true discipleship—choosing to live in a way that reflects Christ's love to those around us, even when it costs us. The notion of obedience in discipleship is intricately linked to joy. Contrary to our culture's narrative that self-indulgence leads to happiness, true joy is found in self-denial and living in alignment with Christ's teachings. This perspective shifts the focus from what we can gain to what we can give, reflecting the heart of the Gospel which is rooted in love and sacrifice.

Discipleship calls for an open heart, one that is willing to say "yes" to God's leading, regardless of where it takes us. It's about being open to making disciples in organic, relational ways—through opening our homes, engaging in Scripture together, and sharing life with both believers and non-believers. The emphasis is not on our capabilities but on our willingness to obey and follow Christ's example of love and service.