

Part of a Church
An Ideal Disciple, Part 8
Pastor Dan Erickson
October 29, 2023

Here is a picture with which many of you are familiar. It symbolizes what we, as the leadership of Chisholm Baptist Church, consider an “Ideal Disciple.” In other words, it represents the characteristics those of you who trust and follow Jesus should strive to develop in your lives. These are qualities we also want to encourage others to develop as we seek to make disciples.

It begins with that big heart in the middle that has been regenerated and is being transformed by God’s spirit. It includes the rays of light surrounding the disciple as he/she reflects the light of Jesus to others in an effort to make more disciples. Then there is the big Bible being held up which is a disciple’s authority and source of guidance and encouragement. There is a map of the world in the background, reminding us that we are called to make disciples of all nations. The disciple is raising his/her hands in worship, because that is what all disciples should strive to do, worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. Then there is the cross over the disciple’s head, reminding us that the message of the cross, the gospel, should be the focus of what a disciple does and says.

Now, we came up with this picture over a year ago and I really thought it was a pretty good illustration of what a disciple should be. However, in the past few weeks we have discovered a couple of flaws.

One, it neglects to identify “prayer” as one of the most important activities in which a disciple can be engaged. No, we cannot depict the person folding his/her hands, because they are already raised and holding a Bible. And the person has no eyes to close. So maybe a kneeling disciple would be a good depiction. When he spoke on October 15, Pastor Mark Bjorlo talked more about what characterizes a praying disciple.

The other flaw in the picture is, there is only one disciple. That is not how it should be. An ideal disciple is in community with other disciples where he/she is encouraged and equipped to follow Jesus. Seeking to make other disciples is a team effort, disciples working with each other to accomplish that goal. Folks, this morning we

explore what it means for each of us. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear, understand, believe, and obey His word today.

#1 All disciples are part of the Church. And I could add whether they like it or not. What I am referring to is often called the universal or invisible church. This consists of all believers in Jesus, or disciples of Jesus, from every time and every place. This is implied in many parts of the New Testament, but perhaps it’s stated most clearly by the apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 12:13 For we were all baptized by on Spirit so as to form one body - whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**

This means a first century believer from Corinth, and fourth century believer in Alexandria, Egypt, and 17th century believer from a village in England, 20th century believer in an African jungle, and a believer in Jesus living on the Iron Range of Minnesota in October 2023, are all part of *the Church*.

Now the Roman Catholic church claims to be the universal church, which is what Catholic means, but none of the Christian believers in this room are part of that church. Jesus Christ is the head of the universal church, but there is no human organization involved.

#2 All disciples of Jesus should be a part of a local church. Every Christian is automatically part of the universal, invisible church. And every Christian should also make the choice to be a part of a *visible* group of believers in Jesus who are functioning as a church. The verse in the Bible to which most point to confirm that is **Hebrews 10:25 Do not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some, but encourage one another and all the more as you say the Day drawing near.**

That is a command. However, I think more significantly, the New Testament really *assumes* that every believer in Jesus will be part of a local church. For example, all the “one another commands,” love one another, serve one another, forgive one another, etc., cannot possibly be

obeyed unless one is in a relationship with other believers in Jesus.

There are also the instructions (Hebrew 13:17 and other places) to honor and submit to your spiritual leaders, the elders in the church. Again, impossible to do if you are not part of a local congregation. Now, in 21st century America, spirituality is in, and religion is out. Many people claim to have a relationship with God but are not connected and don't want to be connected with a church.

I know people who read the Bible and pray daily, who claim to believe what the Bible teaches, but are not connected with any church. Sorry, if you really believe what the Bible teaches, you will want to be part of a church. These, folks usually see themselves as kind of "Lone Ranger" Christians who don't need the support, encouragement, and accountability of a church. But that simply is not true. In **1 Corinthians 12:20,21 there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."** God's plans, His design, is that other Christians, other people in the church will help you follow Jesus, will help you become more like Jesus. And God's plan is that you would be helping others follow Jesus and grow to become the individuals God has called them to be.

Part of the problem is that pastors like me have often stressed that being a Christian is about a relationship with Jesus Christ, not about a connection to a church. And indeed, people can be church members, attenders or active in church ministry and not be Christians because they are trusting in religion rather than Jesus Christ. There is a big problem when people are committed to a church, but not trusting in the Lord Jesus. Yet there is a problem when someone is trusting in Jesus, but not committed to a church.

I like how John Stott put it, "You don't need the church to become a Christian, but you do need the church to be a Christian." By that he means, salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. It is received not by going to church, being involved, or doing anything at all. It is received by simply trusting in what Jesus has done for us through His life, death and resurrection.

However, to be a Christian, which means to seek to be like Jesus, to follow Him, does involve the church and being connected to other believers. So, my friend Joe says he is a Christian, claims to believe in Jesus, but he has not been part of a church for years.

I am in no position to judge whether Joe's profession of faith is genuine, whether he is really a Christian and truly saved. I know if he is trusting in Jesus for salvation, he will be in heaven, even if he has not set foot in a church for 20 years.

But Joe has a problem. I cannot help but wonder. If Joe is truly saved, if he is really trusting in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is indwelling him and seeking to influence him. If Joe has no desire for Christian fellowship, no desire to worship God with other Christians, no desire to be encouraged by other believers, there is something wrong in his soul. Because disciples of Jesus should want to be part of a local church.

#3 All disciples of Jesus should be part of a church that is truly a Christian church. What exactly is a *Christian* church? Well, the New Testament word translated "church" is "ecclesia," which means an assembly or gathering. I would say there are good churches, not so good churches, and groups that call themselves churches, but are not really churches at all.

Traditionally, it has been understood that there are three characteristics of a true, Christian church. First, it recognizes the authority of the Bible and proclaims the gospel. Second, it provides spiritual encouragement and accountability to those who are part of the church. And third, it observes the sacraments or ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. I would also add that a true church gathers regularly worship the triune God, to be instructed from His word, and to fellowship with each other.

Now, obviously some churches do these things better than others. However, when I say "not so good churches" I am thinking of a congregation with serious flaws. Many "home" churches fall into this category, not because they don't have a church building, that is not a requirement at all, but rather because home churches often lack a structure which provides spiritual accountability.

My friends at the Salvation Army do a wonderful ministry. They often are probably more faithful in following Jesus than I am. However, as a church, which is how many people view them, their decision not to practice baptism or observe the Lord's Supper is a serious flaw.

Then there are groups that call themselves churches but are really not churches because they are not Christian. That may seem like a harsh judgment, but groups like the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons, who deny that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, really are not Christian.

And I'm convinced that any church that embraces a theological liberalism that denies basic Christian truth is not a Christian church. For example, there are churches that, instead of confessing the apostle's cred, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord..." have instead embraced the "sparkle creed."

This was recited at the Edina Community Lutheran church, right here in Minnesota this past June, as the congregation celebrated "LGBTQ Pride Month." The folks affirmed "I believe in the non-binary God whose pronouns are plural. I believe in Jesus Christ, their child, who wore a fabulous tunic and had two dads and saw everyone as a sibling-child of God." And the rest of the "creed" was not any better.

Friends, any church, Lutheran, Episcopal, Roman Catholic, or Baptist, where they recite that creed, is not a Christian church. It is not. A disciple should not be part of a church like that.

So as a disciple of Jesus Christ, you should make sure you are part of a church that is truly Christian. I think Chisholm Baptist Church or a church very much like it, is the best type of congregation of which to be a part, but that is just my opinion. Frankly, a church that is best for one disciple, isn't necessarily the best for another. When you, a family member or friend, are choosing a church, the most important thing is to find one that teaches the truth, that is biblically and theologically sound.

The second question is this: Is the church one that will enable you to grow spiritually, and that will provide you an opportunity to serve? Growing and serving is a big part of what being a disciple of

Jesus is about, along with loving God, loving others, and making disciples.

#4 A disciple, an ideal disciple, is active in a local church and committed to that body of believers. To be part of a church means more than saying, "Oh yah, I go to Chisholm Baptist Church," meaning "I missed Easter, but I did get there on Christman Eve last year and for a funeral this summer."

Let me spell out what it looks like for you to be an active part of Chisholm Baptist Church. First, you are a regular participant in the Sunday morning worship services. Participate means you open your mouth during the singing and stay awake during the sermon...at least most of the time. Regular means, well, you attend when you can do so. Work schedules and health issues limit when some of you are able to be here.

A few of you leave Minnesota for a few months in the winter and go to places like Arizona and Florida for some strange reason - you are not able to be there then. Others of you have family responsibilities that mean you are out of town a lot of weekends. Whatever the case, as a disciple of Jesus you should seek to be in church on Sunday morning whenever you can be.

If you are not able to be there, watching the live stream, either on Sunday morning or later in the week, is a good thing to do. If you are out of town on a Sunday, attending another church where they love Jesus and teach the Bible would be a good choice to make.

Second, if you are part of Chisholm Baptist Church, it is good to be an official member, a capital "M" member. Now if you are here regularly on Sunday mornings, but are not an official member, I really don't want you to feel like a second-class part of our church family. However, we certainly should have a chat about why you are not a member.... Yet. No, the Bible doesn't say you "have to be a church member," but when we have our chat, I will explain why it will be spiritually beneficial for you to take that step.

Third, as a disciple of Jesus it would be good to be in some type of small group where you experience spiritual encouragement and accountability. In fact, being part of a small group Bible study is often just what the doctor, or pastor, orders for

good spiritual health. Now, some churches are structured so everyone in the congregation is in the same type of group. That doesn't happen at Chisholm Baptist.

WE have a lot of different kinds of Bible studies and small groups. Some for men, others for women, some for couples, some are open to anyone. Some are made up of 3 or 4 people, others may have 20. Some require "homework," for others you just show up.

If you are not in a small group. But would like to be, or maybe you would like to learn more about these opportunities, make sure you talk to me or one of the other pastors.

#5 Disciples should be willing to serve each other in the church. Most of you know that God call you to love other people. However, the Bible makes it clear that we have special responsibility to love our fellow believers in Jesus, especially those who are part of the same church we are.

In **Galatians 5:13b** the apostle Paul says we are to **Through love serve one another**. He then adds **Galatians 6:10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith**. It is interesting that Jesus says **John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love** (not them, not everyone around us, but) **one another**."

That is, as Francis Schaeffer said, our mark as a Christian, our love for each other. Indeed, some of you in this room will testify that part of what drew you to the Lord, or at least to Chisholm Baptist, is the love the people in this room have for each other.

How do people see that love? Well, lots of hugs and holy kisses in the foyer as people greet each other is evidence of that. No, I don't see many holy kisses, but there are a lot of hugs out there.

Yet, a far more important demonstration of our love is how we serve each other. How does that happen? Well. Of the past 30 years that I have been the Senior pastor of this church, I have witnessed many examples of serving. One that comes to mind is transportation. If someone doesn't have a car, there are all sorts willing to give that person a ride to wherever they need to go. I remember

the Davis girls, Mac, Deitra, and Tiffany talking about how past or Ron picked them up every Wednesday night for years to bring them here to youth club and how their lives were different because of that. Ron continues to pick up numerous people to bring them here to church or wherever they need to go. And it isn't just local transportation. People here give each other rides to medical appointments in Duluth, Minneapolis and Rochester. That is not really a surprise because that is what family members do for each other. And that is what Chisholm Baptist church is... a really big family.

One incident I always remember is when a couple in this church had a daughter living in Kentucky who was going through a difficult time. She needed to move back home to the Rion Range. They had no idea how that could happen. However, one of our deacons, Rick Feiro said, "Hey, my son and I can drive down there, and we will bring this gal and her things back to Hibbing." And that is what they did, just because it was a way to serve a family in our congregation. Rick, who was also a deputy sheriff, went to be with the Lord back in 2010. But his son Andy Feiro continues the tradition of serving others as one of our deacons.

There are many ways people in this congregation serve each other. The King's Helpers are a group that assists others with various home maintenance projects. Some of you have given me envelopes with \$50, \$100, maybe even \$500 and said "Please give this to Joe and Mary. I know their family is going through a tough time right now."

Many gals have provided free babysitting or childcare for a mom in need of some help. In fact, those who volunteer in the church nursery provide a wonderful service by watching little ones so moms and dads can be in here listening to this sermon without being distracted. Serving one another out of love. That is a big part of what it means to be a part of this church. And if you realize that the Lord wants you to be a little more generous serving others, I encourage you to do just that. If you are looking for some ideas how you might serve others, talk to me or one of our pastors.

One more note on serving. A song from the 70's says, *Brother let me be your servant. Let me be as*

Christ to you, pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant too.

If we, as a church, are to serve one another as the Lord intends, you need to be willing to let others serve you. don't be too proud to accept and receive that help. Yes, the Lord will supply your needs, but He often does that through the other people who are part of this congregation.

An old song, composed in 1928 by Don McCrosson, the sung by Elvis and many others, says, "On the Jericho Road there is room for just two, no more and no less, just Jesus and you." Wrong!! On the Jericho Road , a metaphor for following the path God has for us, should include not just Jesus and you, but also brothers and sisters in Christ, usually part of the same local congregation, who travel the road with you, providing encouragement, support and accountability along the way.

Friends may the Lord grant each of you good companions as you travel that road, and may He enable you to be a good companion to others who are seeking rest and follow Jesus as His disciples.